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Retaining Teachers in High-Need Elementary Schools: Factors Influencing Teachers' Commitment to Their Work

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Retaining Teachers in High-Need Elementary Schools:

Factors Influencing Teachers' Commitment to Their Work

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We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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Abstract

I conducted a phenomenological study of the lived experiences of veteran teachers in high-need schools and the meaning of their work. Findings from a review of scholarly literature and selection of analytical theories formed the conceptual framework for my study. In-depth interviews with experienced teachers from a number of high-need schools within an urban district provided descriptions of the work in classrooms, schools, and the broader school district. Exploring experiences of veteran teachers resulted in the identification of personal and organizational factors influencing continued commitment to teaching in high-need schools.

Findings from my analysis revealed factors influencing teacher's continued commitment to their work in high-need schools. Factors increasing commitment to working in high-need schools included: (1) relationships with students, parents, and colleagues, (2) professionalism, and (3) values and a history of service to high-need schools. Positive relationships, growing in professionalism, and values and a history in high-need schools increased teacher satisfaction, confidence, and competency.

Findings revealed three factors decreasing teachers' commitment to their work in high-need schools: (1) student behavior, (2) mobility of students and staff, and (3) the excessive expectations and demands of internal and external stakeholders. Student behavior, staff and student mobility, and internal and external pressures resulted in teachers experiencing a lack of control, uncertainty, and stress. Teachers adopted strategies to cope with the stress threatening the satisfaction derived from work.

Based on the findings, my recommendations focused on strategies to ensure factors increasing commitment overshadowed those decreasing teachers' continued commitment to their work in high-need schools.

Keywords: high-need schools, commitment, teachers, urban, high poverty schools

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Education in the United States provides a "common culture" vital to sustaining a democracy (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, The Risk, para. 3). Through education, individuals acquire skills and knowledge needed to succeed economically and participate fully in democracy; those deprived of education face disenfranchisement (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Providing all citizens the education needed relies on recruiting, preparing, and retaining good teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1998).

A dilemma facing education today involves an unconventional teacher shortage created by high staff turnover as teachers either leave the profession or transfer to other schools (Howard, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001a/b). High poverty urban schools most in need of effective, committed teachers face the greatest challenge attracting and keeping teachers (Howard, 2003). Due to high turnover, building and sustaining quality programming for students with significant learning needs continue to challenge high poverty urban schools (Howard, 2003). The more significant problem in urban schools involves finding ways to retain teachers not recruit them (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Howard, 2003).

My personal history contributed to the value I place on providing a stable school environment staffed with committed teachers. My family settled into a small close-knit community when I was in the third grade and I attended a small elementary school with two teachers teaching the elementary grades one through six. Consequently, during my formative years I had the same teacher for three consecutive years, developing a close, caring relationship with my teacher, eliminating the need to establish relationships with different adults, test limits, and learn new rules. Teaching in the same school over many years, my teachers in both the elementary and secondary schools knew the students, community, families, and the way the

school system operated. All of the teachers in elementary, junior high and high school knew my parents, resulting in frequent, spontaneous communication between home and school. This educational environment created a comfortable, predictable setting resulting in a positive educational experience for me.

The stable educational environment helped me feel comfortable in the classroom setting and learn how to "do" school. In elementary school, I spent time after school helping in the classroom and by the spring of sixth grade, I told my teacher I wanted to become a teacher when I grew up. Teachers seldom left the school system except through retirement, and facing new teachers remained a novel experience during my elementary and secondary years. Subsequently, I developed close relationships with many teachers, admired many of them, and benefited from the expertise they developed over years of teaching experience.

I felt competent, confident, and enjoyed school most of the time, acquiring the academic skills needed to take on gradually more challenging content over the years. When confronted with a challenging academic task, family support and teacher encouragement as well as my personal motivation to do well in school helped me persist. Both school and home environments provided predictable, stable, and structured conditions to support my learning and development. My parents modeled persistence, effort, and discipline in their lives and encouraged me to try new things, providing support along the way. An early academic history surrounded by dedicated teachers and parents laid the foundation for a long history in school as a student and educator. This personal experience bolstered my belief that acquiring a good education hinges on providing every student with committed, motivated teachers.

Following the example provided by many of my teachers, I became a career teacher. For over thirty years, I worked primarily in schools serving a high percentage of students living in

poverty and students of color. Over the years, I experienced first-hand the uncertainty and instability created by high staff turnover as many teachers who began teaching in these schools, after only a few years' experience, either left the profession or transferred to other schools. Working in a position at the district level with an associate superintendent, I provided support to improve student achievement by consulting with administrators and collaborating with grade level teams in high poverty schools. During my time in these schools, I witnessed high teacher turnover hinder instructional programming for students. Rather than build on prior work, high turnover required these schools to focus on training new staff and forming effective grade level teams.

Based on personal experience, I believe students need reliable, secure, dependable adults in their lives; and, children in general rely on adults to provide secure, safe, predictable environments in order to grow and learn. While I recognize students living in poverty and students of color have significant adults in their home life, I think all children also need to find people they can rely on outside their immediate family. Although I have never experienced living in poverty, I assume students of color living in poverty face many obstacles and gaining an education should not be one of them. Students of color living in poverty face limited opportunities for the future without a quality education. I worry about the negative impact of teacher mobility on school programming and student development if this problem continues. A study of teachers committed to working in these schools may provide answers to the question, "How do teachers choosing to remain in high-need urban schools experience their work leading to sustained motivation and commitment?"

Statement of the Problem, Significance, and Purpose

Beginning in the early 1980s, educational experts predicted an increased demand for teachers due to increased student enrollment and teacher attrition resulting from retirement (Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003). Consistent with these predictions, student enrollments increased during the mid-1980s resulting in a demand for teachers in a majority of schools (Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003). In 1987-88, urban public school administrators found it difficult to fill teaching vacancies and coped by using substitutes, cancelling classes, and a few resorted to offering teachers incentives (U.S. Department of Education, 1993).

The teacher shortage believed to result from unavoidable demographic trends led to a focus on supply and demand (Ingersoll, 2001a/b). This supply and demand mindset resulted in initiatives to increase the supply of teachers through alternative licensing programs and "Teach for America" (Ingersoll, 2001a, p. 1). The prevalence and popularity of alternative routes to licensing increased from the late 1980s until the present. As of 2011, approximately 60,000 new teachers a year obtained licenses to teach through alternative routes (National Center for Education Information, 2011, p. ix).

Focusing on ways to decrease attrition and to fill the demand for more teachers resulted in ignoring other staffing issues such as migration between schools, organizational factors contributing to staff turnover, and the disproportionate turnover from particular schools (Ingersoll, 2003). Researchers' analysis of U. S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and Teacher Followup Survey (TFS) revealed the root cause of staffing difficulties did not simply result from a lack of qualified candidates (Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003). In fact, over 90% of new hires replaced departing teachers, indicating teacher turnover drove teacher shortages rather than a lack of qualified

teachers (Ingersoll, 2001a, p. 4). The shortage reflected a "revolving door" with new teachers replacing teachers migrating to other schools or professions (Ingersoll, 2001a, p. 6). This suggested alleviating the teacher shortage would not result from focusing solely on recruiting more teachers (Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003).

The emphasis on highly qualified teachers in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001 placed an additional burden on schools struggling to staff classrooms with teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Greenlee & Brown, 2009). Although schools successfully recruited highly qualified teachers, the high rate of departures indicated a challenge retaining them (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Howard, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003). The era of accountability and public scrutiny ushered in with NCLB added to the challenge of retaining teachers in low income, low performance schools (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

High poverty public schools experienced greater turnover than more affluent schools (Ingersoll, 2001a/b). Jacob's (2007) examination of SASS data from 2003-04 revealed a smaller percentage of urban teachers stayed at the same schools for four or more years when compared to suburban counterparts. In public schools, frequent turnover and migration continue to affect high poverty schools more than affluent suburban schools (Grissom, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003; Jacob, 2007). "Thus, urban schools, where many students are perennial underachievers, lack the most essential resource to overcome student underachievement: a full array of qualified teachers" (Howard, 2003, p. 143).

The constant turnover of teachers in high-need schools creates problems for schools and students. School leaders struggled with problems in hiring staff, and maintaining consistent programming (Ingersoll, 2001a), and training teachers (Jacob, 2007). The constant churning of teachers resulting in a lack of continuity and consistency of instruction affected student

performance and achievement (Ingersoll, 2001a). In spite of numerous initiatives and incentives such as Teach for America, alternative licensing (Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003), and signing bonuses (Berry, 2008) designed to increase the supply of teachers, the problem persists. Rather than focus on recruiting more teachers, the more significant problem involves finding ways to retain teachers currently in high-need, urban schools (Howard, 2003).

A qualitative study holds potential for understanding the complex, prevailing challenge of retaining teachers in high-need urban schools. Insights reside within the lived experiences of seasoned classroom teachers in these very schools. The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of teachers with a sustained commitment to teaching primarily disadvantaged students in high-need schools. When referring to high-need schools, I mean schools in which "at least 80 percent of the children in the school attendance area are from low-income families" (Petty, Fitchett, & O'Connor, 2012, p. 70). The knowledge gained from this study of committed teachers working in challenging schools may help leaders understand what fosters dedication and holds potential for teacher retention.

Research Question

Teachers interpret and adapt to experiences within and outside the school shaping their career attitudes and decisions (Yee, 1990). A qualitative study of how teachers choosing to teach in high-need schools experience their work would attempt to answer the research question: "How do veteran teachers working in high-need urban schools with primarily disadvantaged students experience and make meaning of their work?" I adopted the following questions to support my study:

1. What experiences, beliefs, and values guide/influence their work teaching high-need students?

2. How does teaching in a high-need school affect their view of students, teaching, and the nature of education?
3. What internal and external factors/conditions affect their commitment and success in serving high-need students?
4. How does teaching disadvantaged students in high-need schools influence their personal and professional growth?
5. How do veteran teachers sustain their commitment to serve disadvantaged students in a high-need school?

Definition of Terms

Commitment: An "evolving, rather than a static, phenomenon" (Taylor & Frankenberg, 2009, p. 330) identified as a "positive affective attachment to one's work" resulting from satisfaction accrued from a job (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988, p. 286). Commitment consists of multiple dimensions including devotion to students, loyalty to a specific school, and dedication to the profession (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988). While related, these dimensions operate independent of each other, resulting in different behaviors depending on the focus of the commitment (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988).

Committed teachers: Teachers experiencing "strong psychological ties to their school, their students, or their subject areas" (Firestone & Pennell, 1993, p. 489) and feeling "special meaning and importance" toward their work (Firestone & Pennell, 1993, p. 491).

Disadvantaged student: Factors used to distinguish these students include "minority or poverty status" and "sometimes achievement level as well" (Grissom, 2011, p. 2556). This includes students considered at-risk due to "various environmental factors beyond their control (e.g., homelessness, high mobility, poverty)" with an "increased likelihood

of experiencing challenges in attending, succeeding, and remaining in school" (Popp, Grant, & Stronge, 2011, p. 276).

High-need schools: Schools in which "at least 80 percent of the children in the school attendance area are from low-income families" (Petty et al., 2012, p. 70).

Low-income families: "Families whose income is at or below the levels shown eligible for free or reduced priced meals" (Petty, O'Connor, & Dagenhart, 2011, p. 2).

Teacher retention: Teachers in a school who continue to teach in the same school the following year (Eckert, 2012).

Teacher turnover: Teachers migrating or moving to "other teaching jobs in other schools" and those leaving the profession altogether (referred to as attrition; Ingersoll, 2003, p. 9).

Urban schools: Schools located in an urban area (Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008) or large cities (Jacob, 2007). Many urban schools "serve higher socioeconomic status neighborhoods and include white students as well as minorities" (Brunetti, 2006, p. 812).

Veteran teacher: Experienced teachers with 15 or more years in the classroom (Brunetti, 2006).

Dissertation Overview

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the research topic, identifies the problem my research addressed, and highlights the significance of my research topic. I provide a description of my experience with the research topic, identify the purpose of the study, list research questions, and define terms.

I describe findings from a review of existing scholarly literature related to teacher commitment to work in high-need schools in Chapter 2. Describing an analysis of the

findings from scholarly research within three theoretical frameworks reveals limitations and gaps in the existing literature. Concluding this chapter, I identify two themes forming the conceptual framework for my current study.

Chapter 3 contains an explanation and rationale for selecting the research approach, sampling method, and development of interview questions. Information included identifies procedures used to safeguard participants through the Institutional Review Board, to recruit participants, to conduct interviews, and to collect and analyze data. Methods ensuring the validity and reliability of the study conclude the chapter.

Descriptions of findings from the study comprise Chapter 4. Themes identified in this chapter consist of factors increasing commitment to work in high-need schools. Chapter 5 includes findings grouped into themes composed of factors decreasing teacher commitment to work in high-need schools. Coping strategies participants identified for handling challenges close this chapter.

Chapter 6 begins with a summary of findings influencing teachers' continued commitment to work in high-need schools. Analysis of the findings using two analytic theories follows. First, Bandura's self-efficacy theory provides a framework for examining teachers' experiences and perception of these experiences. Next, Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frame model supports understanding how organizational factors influence teacher commitment.

Summarized findings from the study on teachers' commitment to work in high-need schools open Chapter 7, followed by descriptions of implications and recommendations based in the findings. Areas for further research complete the chapter.

This study purposed to explore the experiences of veteran teachers choosing to work in high-need schools to understand the dilemma of high teacher turnover facing many schools today. Knowledge gained holds potential for helping leaders in schools understand factors fostering teachers' continued commitment to working in high poverty schools. Establishing a knowledge base begins with a review of existing scholarly literature on teacher retention in high-need schools.

CHAPTER TWO REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I conducted a review of literature to identify scholarly studies related to my research question: How do veteran teachers working in high-need urban schools with economically disadvantaged students experience and make meaning of their work? I reviewed scholarly research on teacher retention and attrition in high poverty urban schools. I examined scholarly literature to gain an understanding of factors influencing teachers' continued commitment to serving economically disadvantaged students in high-need schools. Reviewing scholarly literature, I sought to learn about the organizational, professional, and psychological factors influencing teachers' career decisions. Overall, a significant amount of scholarly literature on teacher retention in high-need schools emerged. I organized my findings into five themes: (1) career decisions, (2) career satisfaction and commitment, (3) teacher preparation, (4) novice teachers, and (5) retention of urban teachers and resiliency in high-need schools. Next, I review and analyze the scholarly literature obtained from this search and identify key theoretical frameworks. Following this review, I describe the theories used to analyze my findings.

Career Decisions

During their teaching careers, teachers make decisions to remain at schools, transfer to other schools, advance to non-classroom positions, or leave the teaching profession. Certo and Fox's (2002) exploration of teacher attrition and retention in urban, suburban, and rural schools proposed reasons for staying and leaving operate as inverse variables (for example, teachers left because of inadequate administrative support or stayed when they perceived administrative support). Based on these findings, identifying factors contributing to attrition would assist those interested in teacher retention. Scholarly research indicated individual teacher characteristics, organizational factors, and compatibility with school culture influenced career paths for teachers.

Individual Teacher Characteristics

A number of studies on teachers' career decisions made a connection to teachers' personal attributes (Boe, Bobbitt, & Cook, 1997; Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2005; Ingersoll, 2003; Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2002). Novice teachers and teachers in specific content areas such as mathematics, science, and special education departed teaching at higher rates than other teachers (Boe et al., 1997; Ingersoll, 2003). Lankford et al. (2002) found teachers with high qualifications more likely to leave poor urban schools for suburban schools.

Boyd et al. (2005) substantiated a connection between teachers with high qualifications and student achievement. For beginning teachers, the probability of teacher turnover increased in relation to the achievement level of students and racial composition of the student body (Boyd et al., 2005). Boyd et al. found novice teachers with high qualifications more likely to transfer or quit low achieving schools. Additionally, as the proportion of White students decreased, the likelihood of transfer for White or Hispanic teachers increased (Boyd et al., 2005). Boyd et al. contended geography also played a role for these teachers who had previously lived outside the city prior to teaching.

Organizational Factors

A number of researchers examined the role work conditions play in teachers' decisions to remain or leave schools (Certo & Fox, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Horng, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003). Examining teacher turnover from an organizational perspective, Ingersoll (2001a/b, 2003) found teachers left their position because of job dissatisfaction resulting from inadequate administrative support, student discipline problems, limited faculty input into school decision-making, and low salaries. Darling-Hammond's (2003) review of literature regarding teacher attrition identified four factors strongly influencing staff attrition for beginning teachers:

salary, working conditions, preparation, and mentoring. Certo and Fox (2002) found reasons teachers gave for leaving their position included low salary, inadequate administrative support, and lack of adequate planning time. Horng (2009) aimed to understand reasons teachers left high poverty urban schools by investigating the importance of various workplace factors for teachers and concluded teachers leave high poverty schools because of the poor work conditions rather than student demographics.

School Culture

However, some researchers determined organizational factors influencing attrition and retention consist of more than work conditions. Swars, Meyers, Mays, and Lack (2009) found compatibility of teachers' beliefs and practices with school norms and ability to meet teachers' relational needs critical to teacher mobility and retention. Teachers left due to a mismatch of teaching philosophies, lack of trust and influence, inequitable treatment, and incompatibility with the leadership style. Santoro and Morehouse's (2011) exploration of attrition found experienced and committed teachers resigned when schools required they adjust teaching to use practices conflicting with their beliefs about good teaching.

Although the academic research identified multiple organizational and personal factors contributing to teacher attrition, individual teachers may leave for one or several reasons (Certo & Fox, 2002). Many researchers identified salary and administrative support as important organizational factors influencing career decisions. Consideration of academic literature on job satisfaction and commitment revealed a number of factors contributing to teacher retention.

Career Satisfaction and Commitment

While the importance of job satisfaction and commitment appears obvious, the impact of particular incentives and research on teacher commitment continue as areas of study (Billingsley

& Cross, 1992; Firestone & Pennell, 1993). The relationship between job satisfaction and commitment remains complicated. "One of the many variables that might be used to predict commitment is job satisfaction. However, it is not clear whether enhanced job satisfaction leads to commitment, or whether increased commitment leads to greater job satisfaction" (Billingsley & Cross, 1992, p. 456). Academic researchers examined work conditions, social factors, and professional aspects to develop a deeper understanding of job satisfaction and commitment.

Work Conditions

Numerous researchers investigated the connection between teacher satisfaction and work conditions such as class size, resources, learning opportunities, and safety. Other social factors within the work environment affected teachers' commitment and included principal support, collaboration, participation in decision-making, and mentoring. Fostering commitment from teachers relied on differentiation of support and incentives (Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990).

Incentive policies altered work conditions resulting in consequences for commitment. Firestone and Pennell (1993) reviewed extensive research on workplace conditions including "job design characteristics, feedback, autonomy, participation, collaboration, learning opportunities, and resources" (p. 489) using a framework for determining how differential incentive policies affect teacher commitment. After examining various incentives Firestone and Pennell concluded, competitive incentives pit teachers against each other undermining commitment. Firestone and Pennell recommended increasing teacher participation, expanding collaboration, increasing learning opportunities, and providing effective feedback to increase commitment.

Examining teacher retention through an analysis of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data regarding the characteristics of "stayers", Kearney (2008) identified factors influencing teachers' satisfaction. These included satisfaction with regard to their salary, opportunities for professional advancement, administrative support, and safety in schools. Aspects of teacher dissatisfaction included class size, society's low opinion of teachers, and lack of student motivation (Kearney, 2008). In most areas, elementary teachers proved more satisfied with elements of their work than secondary teachers (Kearney, 2008).

Firestone and Rosenblum (1988) studied interaction between the commitment level of students and teachers in ten urban high schools. Interviews revealed a mutual dependence between teachers and students resulting in the commitment level of one group affecting the commitment of the other (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988). They proposed school factors such as creating a sense of purpose, establishing high expectations, and sharing influence may result in changes in both student and teacher commitment (Firestone & Rosenblum, 1988).

In a study examining the differential impact of organizational conditions in schools on teacher commitment at various career stages, Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990) found the needs of teachers varied over time and at different stages of their career. Consequently, conditions fostering commitment differed according to career stage (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Organizational conditions promoting commitment for beginning teachers included principal support, while experienced and midcareer teachers needed "task discretion and autonomy" (Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990, p.254).

In another study, leader support, role conflict, role ambiguity, and stress better predicted "commitment and job satisfaction than demographic variables" (Billingsley & Cross, 1992, p. 453). Billingsley and Cross (1992) found a connection existed between leadership and

commitment to a school, but no relationship surfaced between leader support and professional commitment. The findings hold significance in understanding turnover because they indicate teachers dissatisfied with leaders change schools rather than leave the profession (Billingsley & Cross, 1992).

Mueller, Finley, Iverson, and Price (1999) confirmed the connection between role conflict, autonomy, work conditions and commitment. In schools with high numbers of students of color, White teachers cited greater role conflict, less autonomy, inadequate resources, and reduced coworker support as reasons for greater job dissatisfaction (Mueller et al., 1999). Although these teachers showed less commitment to the school, their commitment to the profession remained, encouraging migration to another school rather than leaving the profession (Mueller et al., 1999).

Social Factors

Social factors include relationships with parents, students, colleagues, and administrators. Numerous studies found relationships important to sustaining motivation and teacher retention (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Brunetti, 2001; Johnson, Kraft, & Papay, 2007; Marston, Brunetti, & Courtney, 2004; Shann, 1998). A number of researchers found relationships with students a key motivator for teachers (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Brunetti, 200l; Marston et al., 2004; Shann, 1998). Brunetti, Courtney, and Marston (2006) found motivating factors for elementary teachers with 15 or more years included working with young children, fulfilling a professional commitment, and valuing relationships with colleagues and administrators. In a comparison study of elementary and secondary teachers, Marston et al. (2004) found working with students a common motivating factor. However, secondary teachers did not place as much importance as

elementary teachers on relationships with fellow teachers or administrators (Marston et al., 2004).

Johnson et al. (2007) examined work conditions most important to job satisfaction and the impact on student performance. Work conditions rather than student demographics affected job satisfaction in high poverty, minority schools resulting in turnover (Johnson et al., 2007). Social conditions at work affecting teacher satisfaction the most included collegial relationships, principal support, and school culture (Johnson et al., 2007).

Further support for the value teachers placed on social factors surfaced in Shann's (1998) interviews with middle school teachers. Teachers rated relationships with students highest in importance and satisfaction (Shann, 1998). The level of participation in decision-making, student achievement, and job security ranked least satisfying for teachers (Shann, 1998).

Professional Factors

Professional elements influencing satisfaction and retention included seeing students learn, making a difference, engaging in a subject area, initial commitment to the profession, and efficacy. Brunetti (2001) explored high school teachers' source of motivation, satisfaction, and level of commitment and identified working with students and seeing young people learn as the most powerful motivator. A passion for their content area, autonomy, collegiality, and summer vacations influenced commitment of veteran teachers (Brunetti, 2001).

Surveying graduates with teaching certificates to determine variables influencing attrition, Chapman (1984) found initial commitment to teaching and early teaching experience influenced career satisfaction and retention. The quality of professional life during early teaching experiences either promoted or discouraged teachers' desire to continue teaching (Chapman, 1984; Chapman & Green, 1986).

Teacher efficacy has emerged as an important construct in research on teaching (Coldarci, 1992). Efficacy in teaching involves a general sense that as an outcome, education prepares students; however, personal efficacy or self-efficacy involves teachers having confidence they can effectively teach their students in spite of obstacles (Coladarci, 1992). Eckert (2012) found teacher training requirements increased preparedness to teach but did not increase personal efficacy or retention rates. Changes in self-efficacy or personal efficacy occur in the early years of teaching, but once established a teacher's self-efficacy becomes resistant to change (Hoy, 2000).

Johnson and Birkeland (2003) found efficacy or a teacher's perceived likelihood of success central to his or her decision to stay or leave a school. Working conditions such as supportive administrators, helpful colleagues, and adequate facilities increased the chance of efficacy by reducing uncertainty (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Establishing supportive networks within and beyond schools created potential for countering workplace issues hampering success and efficacy (Anderson, 2010). While school factors including class size and principal support fostered teacher commitment, Coladarci (1992) found personal efficacy and general efficacy had the greatest potential for predicting teacher commitment. Differing slightly from Coladari's view, Kurz (2006) claimed only academic optimism predicted teacher commitment. The construct of academic optimism consists of self-efficacy, trusting relationships with students and parents, and emphasis on academics (Kurz, 2006).

Although established efficacy usually remained resistant to change, some researchers found change in efficacy occurred under certain circumstances. In urban settings, successful mastery of difficult tasks as student teachers resulted in increased self-efficacy (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008). Tucker, Porter, Reinke, Herman, Ivery, Mack, and Jackson (2005) found

training and ongoing coaching increased teacher self-efficacy for working with children from diverse backgrounds. These studies highlighted positive changes in efficacy through successful mastery of challenging tasks and structuring experiences to ensure success. However, increases in efficacy occurring during student teaching experiences remained vulnerable in the early years of teaching (Hoy & Spero, 2005). For example, removal of the supportive environment sheltering the student teaching experience often resulted in a dip in efficacy once the teachers moved to their own classroom (Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Teacher Preparation

Chapman (1984) found an individual's initial commitment and early teaching experiences influenced career satisfaction and retention. Researchers of urban-focused teacher education programs (TEP) and pre-service experiences provided insight into teacher retention in urban schools. The research on urban-focused TEP covered commitment of teacher candidates, impact of TEP on candidates, and retention outcomes. Scholars studying pre-service experiences centered on the experiences impact on candidates' interest in and perception of urban schools (Groulx, 2001; McKinney, Haberman, Stafford-Johnson, & Robinson, 2007; Robinson, McKinney, & Spooner, 2004).

Urban-Focused Teacher Education Programs

Recognizing the importance of initial commitment and early experiences, Taylor and Frankenberg (2009) studied changing commitment to urban schools reported by teacher candidates in an urban-focused TEP and found early commitment predicted positive commitment at completion of the program. Urban-focused teacher preparation outweighed the effect of personal characteristics and prior experiences on commitment to teaching in urban schools (Taylor & Frankenberg, 2009).

A number of researchers examined the impact of teacher education programming aimed at preparing urban educators on candidates' career decisions, and found graduates from urban TEP taught in urban schools for only a short time (Donaldson, 2009). Frankenberg, Taylor, and Merseth (2009) explored the relationship between initial commitment and career decisions of candidates from an urban-focused TEP. Graduates reporting higher commitment at the end of training taught in urban schools for up to three years (Frankenberg et al., 2009). Donaldson's (2009) survey of urban-focused cohorts and non-urban focused cohorts from Harvard University's Graduate Program also revealed urban-focused cohort members more likely to work in urban schools and more likely to leave within five years. Tamir (2010) found retention rates after five years higher in the programs preparing teachers for urban or religious schools when compared to national trends.

For a considerable percentage of teachers in urban-focused programs, dedication to social change resulted in the pursuit of administrative positions (Hunter Quartz, 2003; Tamir, 2009, 2010). Surprisingly, even though many graduates of urban TEP expressed feeling "under-prepared to teach in urban schools" they moved into leadership positions (Donaldson, 2009, p. 363). Maintaining a commitment to social justice and social change that drew them into urban-focused programs, many graduates sought to fulfill their commitment by leaving the classroom for other positions focused on urban education (Donaldson, 2009; Olsen & Anderson, 2007; Tamir, 2009). Olsen and Anderson's (2007) examination of early career decisions of teachers trained in an urban-focused TEP found many used teaching as a stepping stone to administration.

Pre-Service Experiences

Professional development schools (PDS) provided another approach to preparing teachers for success in urban schools. Experience working in a PDS school, according to Groulx (2001),

increased confidence, commitment, and interest in teaching in urban schools for prospective teachers. In contrast, Robinson et al. (2004) found no difference following student teaching between student interns placed in an urban PDS and those placed in non-PDS schools. McKinney et al.'s (2007) evaluation found internship experiences did not significantly change characteristics needed to teach in high poverty urban schools for interns. These studies suggested internships did not provide enough time for interns to internalize beliefs and dispositions of effective urban teachers (McKinney et al., 2007; Robinson et al., 2004).

In summary, researchers found programs designed to promote urban teaching did not increase teacher retention past five years, challenging Chapman's (1984) identification of initial commitment and early experiences as critically important to retention. Regarding urban-focused TEPs, many graduates sustained their commitment to social change but not as teachers. Studies on the link between early internship experiences for teacher retention resulted in mixed findings.

Novice Teachers

Novice teachers face a significant transition during their first year of teaching. Kumi-Yeboah and James (2012) followed one first year teacher's progression through various transformational experiences. This teacher's preparation, organization, hard work and dedication, along with mentoring and professional development emerged as critical to retention (Kumi-Yeboah & James, 2012).

Successfully navigating initial years of teaching requires fortitude and resourcefulness on the part of novice teachers (Castro, Kelly, & Shih, 2010). Castro et al. (2010) investigated strategies used by novice teachers in high need areas to overcome challenges and respond to adverse circumstances. Findings indicated resilience strategies used by novice teachers included acquiring needed help, engaging in problem-solving, managing difficult relationships, and

seeking a balanced life (Castro et al., 2010). Castro et al. contended that focusing on resilience strategies might provide ways for novice teachers to manage and sustain themselves increasing teacher retention.

Schools serving high poverty students of color struggled to find ways to support beginning teachers to reduce their exodus to other schools. In an analysis of non-pecuniary school factors, Scafidi, Sjoquistb, and Stinebrickner (2004) found new teachers more likely to migrate from schools with high minority, high poverty, and low achievement scores. Schools affect beginning teachers by supporting them through challenges, thus increasing their potential for becoming experienced teachers (Wynn, Wilson Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Wynn et al. (2007) explored how mentoring, work conditions, and leadership intersected to support beginning teachers during their first three years. They found work conditions and school leadership influenced a beginning teacher's decision to remain in a school (Wynn et al., 2007). Although mentoring showed no impact on teacher retention, Wynn et al. suggested the ineffectiveness of the mentoring might contribute to the lack of impact found.

While a number of approaches to mentoring exist, Souto-Manning and Dice (2007) examined a collaborative mentoring approach encouraging reflective teaching, learning from students, and engaging in action research to address problems in the classroom. After taking part in the mentoring experience, the beginning teachers reported feeling like a "valuable member of the teaching community" (Souto-Manning & Dice, 2007, p. 429). Findings from this case study indicated the beginning teacher, students, other teachers in the school, and participating university professors benefited from the collaborative mentoring approach.

Ado (2013) found early career teachers benefited from engaging in action research. The action research projects led to job satisfaction resulting from assistance in addressing everyday

problems, making professional development relevant to teachers' daily lives, developing a sense of community, and working with teachers at various levels of experience (Ado, 2013). Some benefits included developing a collaborative professional culture, providing context-specific support for teachers, and enabling teachers to feel empowered (Ado, 2013).

Retention of Urban Teachers

A number of researchers examined attrition and retention specifically within urban schools from an organizational perspective. McConney, Ayres, Hansen, and Cuthbertson (2003) reviewed human resource issues including recruitment, retention, mentoring, professional development, and evaluation for principals and teachers within the Baltimore School District. The strongest reason cited for staying included challenges and rewards of teaching in an urban setting and familiarity with the job (McConney et al., 2003). Reasons teachers left included lack of resources, inadequate administrative support, and concerns regarding the performance evaluation system (McConney et al., 2003).

Teachers' perspectives in high-need schools revealed insight into issues of teacher retention. Exploring ways to attract and retain middle school teachers working in high-need schools in North Carolina, Petty et al. (2011) found reasons teachers gave for staying included receiving administrative support, enjoying their work, and making a difference. Reasons teachers contemplated leaving within five years included increase in job demands, retirement, and low pay (Petty et al., 2011). Greenlee and Brown (2009) surveyed teachers enrolled in an educational leadership program to determine incentives enticing teachers to teach in low-income, low performing schools. They found greater curricula autonomy, opportunities for professional development, and input into school decision-making motivated teachers to work in these schools

(Greenlee & Brown, 2009). Greenlee and Brown concluded leadership behavior resulting in improved working conditions provided the greatest potential for teacher retention.

Teachers in schools with high numbers of disadvantaged students ranked work environments as poor and principals as ineffective (Grissom, 2011). These schools experienced higher annual turnover and employed more first year teachers than other schools (Grissom, 2011). Grissom (2011) found principals increased teacher satisfaction and reduced turnover by mitigating negative work conditions. In brief, a number of researchers pointed to the role of work conditions and administrators in teacher attrition and retention in high-need urban schools. Other factors emerging from the research affecting teacher retention included personal ideology, internal rewards, and social factors.

Ideology

Personal beliefs and ideology interact with experiences teaching in high-need schools, leading some teachers to commit to teaching in these schools, while other teachers decide to leave (Haberman & Post, 1998; Rinke, 2011; Robinson, 2007). Haberman and Post (1998) argued certain predispositions and ideology based on bias, beliefs, and values influenced effectiveness of urban teachers. Robinson (2007) explored the role of poverty ideology in attracting and retaining teachers in high poverty schools. His research concluded teachers attracted to and remaining in high poverty schools viewed poverty as rooted in social structure (Robinson, 2007). Teachers with a "structuralist" ideology believed they had a significant amount of influence on their students' education and expressed satisfaction with their job (Robinson, 2007, p.559).

Acknowledging the influence of personal biography and individual perspectives, Rinke's (2011) study examined secondary science teachers' thinking about their careers and career

decisions in urban schools. Personal biographies affected experiences and relationships in schools resulting in different levels of teacher investment and commitment (Rinke, 2011). Rinke proposed career decisions involved personal characteristics and organizational factors filtered through an individual's perspectives on teaching.

Internal Rewards

Several researchers found readily available internal rewards effective in teacher retention. Ng and Peter (2010) used a narrative approach to explore the decision of teachers alternatively licensed to remain, change schools, or leave teaching after their formalized training. Feeling successful influenced commitment to continue teaching (Ng & Peter, 2010). Psychic rewards such as "making a difference" and "giving back to society" emerged as strongly influencing the participant's decision to enter teaching (Ng & Peter, 2010, p 132). Exploring factors influencing retention of urban high school teachers, Bradley and Loadman (2005) found teachers entered the profession to work with children, enhance their learning, and make an impact on society. In addition to finding relationships with students motivating, teachers found career satisfaction in students succeeding and knowing they affected students' lives (Bradley & Loadman, 2005).

Experiencing success or a sense of efficacy promoted retention in teaching (Anderson, 2010; Coladarci, 1992; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Yee's (1990) case study of three urban high schools found teachers achieving intrinsic rewards through successful teaching uninterested in leaving. On the other hand, teachers failing to achieve classroom results experienced a decrease in self-efficacy and looked for satisfaction in extrinsic rewards (Yee, 1990). Waddell (2010) found both internal and external components resulted in teachers remaining in urban schools past the five-year attrition mark. Four internal themes identified included "(1) perseverance, (2) self-efficacy, (3) service, and (4) a sense of ownership" (Waddell, 2010, p. 74).

Although relationships with principals and colleagues fall within social factors, they also hold potential for influencing "self-efficacy, perseverance, and sense of ownership" (Waddell, 2010, p. 78).

Social Factors

The significance of social factors for retention emerged in numerous studies (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Brunetti, 2001; Brunetti et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2007; Marston et al., 2004; Shann, 1998;). Bridwell (2012) examined perceptions of African American teachers in urban schools using critical race theory, and revealed quality relationships with students as a leading factor in job satisfaction. Although leadership support influenced retention, feelings about students and commitment to achieving positive outcomes overshadowed negative attitudes regarding work conditions and leadership (Bridwell, 2012).

Resiliency in High-Need Schools

A few scholars examined ways to encourage retention and resiliency strategies for teachers working in high-need schools. Berry's (2008) study focused on policy recommendations from National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTS) across five states to support and attract teachers to high-need schools. Broad recommendations included, (1) improving the teaching conditions, (2) preparing and supporting teachers to work with diverse students, (3) developing administrators with an ability to use teacher leader expertise effectively, (4) establishing multiple recruitment incentives, and (5) encouraging certification of teachers meeting NBCT standards in high-needs schools (Berry, 2008).

Interested in learning why teachers stayed in urban schools, Nieto's (2001, 2003) year-long discussion with high school teachers found they valued relationships with students, felt hopeful about the future, and believed teaching involved constant development. Brunetti (2006)

examined secondary teachers' reasons for remaining in an urban school and the role of resilience. Brunetti (2006) defined resilience as a personal quality enabling teachers to stay committed to teaching despite challenges and setbacks. Fortified with the resiliency needed to deal with frustration, the reasons teachers gave for staying included devotion to students, professional fulfillment, and collegial support (Brunetti, 2006). A number of researchers indicated social factors including relationships with students, colleagues, and administration, proved significant to retention in high-need (Brunetti, 2006) and urban schools (Bridwell, 2012; Waddell, 2010).

Building resiliency enabled teachers to face stressful work situations without becoming disillusioned (Brunetti, 2006). Patterson, Collins, and Abott (2004) examined strategies used by highly effective urban teachers and teacher leaders to build personal resilience. They defined resilience as "using energy productively to achieve school goals in the face of adversity" (Patterson et al., 2004, p. 3). Effective, resilient teachers used personal values to guide professional decision-making, pursue professional development, mentor others, and remain student centered (Patterson et al., 2004).

Conceiving the construct of resiliency as the process of adapting to adverse conditions and contexts, Yonezawa, Jones, and Robb Singer (2011) examined the impact of environmental support on the professional resiliency in teachers. In-depth case studies with six educators from urban high poverty schools who participated in a professional development network known as National Writing Project (NWP) revealed a number of ways the project fostered professional resiliency. Teachers reported the writing project improved teaching techniques, provided a professional learning community, and reinvigorated their teaching career (Yonezawa, et al., 2011).

Theoretical Frameworks in the Literature

The anticipation of a teacher shortage in the early 1980s resulted in significant academic research on teacher retention and attrition. The scholarly research reviewed from 1984 to 2013 focused on teacher attrition and retention and resulted in slightly more quantitative than qualitative studies especially in much of the early research. Quantitative research starting in 2000, focused on individual or contextual factors contributing to teachers staying or leaving the profession or school. Qualitative research from 2000 to 2013 included grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and narrative methodology using a broad range of theoretical perspectives.

Scholars used a variety of theories to frame their studies in the research reviewed. Three theoretical frameworks found across multiple studies included organizational theory, theory of career decisions, and teacher efficacy. These theories used by researchers formed the basis for groundbreaking studies on teacher retention, commitment, and career paths. Furthermore, researchers used these theories to clarify and explain the phenomenon of teacher retention from the point of view of both the teacher and the organization. In this section, I describe the three theoretical frameworks: organizational theory, theory of career decisions, and teacher efficacy. Next, I provide an analysis of the research and methods of each theoretical framework including limitations and gaps.

Organizational Theory

Organizational theorists consider employee turnover an important organizational phenomenon (Mobley, 1982; Price, 1989). Organizational theory asserts that responding to turnover requires understanding the causes and consequences within the context of organizations where the process occurred (Mobley, 1982). While organizational theory asserts managed

turnover helps organizations avoid stagnation and promotes innovation, high levels of turnover indicate problems within an organization (Ingersoll, 2003; Mobley, 1982). Additionally, disruption from high levels of turnover creates problems for organizations (Mobley, 1982). By "bringing the organization back in," Ingersoll (2003, p. 6) shifted the focus in education to a teacher retention problem rooted in the organization.

Understanding turnover using organizational theory includes considering workplace conditions such as supportive supervisors, salary, flexible hours, and facilities affecting commitment to the organization (Mobley, 1982). Based on the premise that understanding turnover required examining conditions of the organization in which employees work, Ingersoll (2001a/b, 2003) analyzed TFS data to identify reasons teachers gave for leaving. Ingersoll (2001a/b, 2003) found teachers who left cited dissatisfaction with many work conditions including salary and insufficient administrative support. Examining work conditions and turnover in high-need schools, Grissom (2011) concluded poor work conditions correlated with student demographics led to higher turnover. To understand teacher attrition in high-need schools, Horng (2009) used conjoint analysis of survey data to identify preferred work conditions. This research approach resulted in identifying improvements in organizational conditions such as clean, safe facilities; supportive administrators; and low class size with potential for increasing teacher retention.

Theory of Career Decision-Making

Some researchers employed social learning theory from work initiated by Krumboltz (1976) to study teachers' decisions to leave or stay in teaching. Social learning theory suggests people learn about themselves through daily encounters, adapt approaches to tasks based on feedback, and develop interests by engaging in different opportunities (Feller, Honaker, &

Zagzebski, 2001). Learning experiences lead to interests in certain occupations needing certain skills acquired through education (Krumboltz, Mitchell, & Jones, 1976).

Krumboltz's theory of career decision-making contended career decisions resulted from interactions among personal characteristics, environmental factors, learning experiences, cognitive and emotional responses, and performance skills (Krumboltz et al., 1976). Personal characteristics consist of inherited qualities restricting or permitting access to different learning experiences and individual differences in predispositions to benefit from certain learning experiences (Krumboltz et al., 1976). Environmental factors influencing career decision-making include "social, economic, cultural, and political" conditions or naturally occurring forces of nature (Krumboltz et al., 1976, p. 71).

Two types of learning experiences impacting career decision-making include "instrumental learning experiences" (ILEs) and "associative learning experiences" (ALEs) (Krumboltz et al., 1976, p.72). ILEs occur as a person uses innate abilities to develop specific talents needed to perform tasks resulting in a consequence (Krumboltz et al., 1976). Cognitive and emotional consequences of ILEs include feedback from self and others and direct observation of the outcome (Krumboltz et al., 1976). On the other hand, ALEs result when connections occurring between the attitudes conveyed about a profession and the views adopted about a profession influence a person's career decision (Krumboltz et al., 1976). The interaction of personal characteristics, environmental factors, and learning experiences results in developing cognitive and performance skills used to handle the environment (Krumboltz et al., 1976).

Applying tenets of Krumboltz's theory of career decisions, Chapman (1984) developed a model for teacher retention by isolating specific variables through statistical analysis of survey responses of graduates with teaching certificates taking different career paths. Extending

research on Chapman's model of retention, Chapman and Green (1986) reconfigured the grouping of graduates according to career paths and applied discriminant analysis to survey responses. Both studies supported the importance of two components drawn from tenets of social learning theory: initial commitment and early teaching experiences. These researchers focused on understanding factors predicting retention of individual teachers.

Career decision-making also employed Super's (1953) theory of career development**.** The professional life cycle developed by Super provided the framework for studying a process of career development for teachers. Super's theory premised on the idea that differences in abilities, interests, and personality makes people potential candidates for various occupations requiring specific abilities, interests, and personalities. Additionally, vocational preferences and competencies change over time based on new experiences resulting in career stages (Super, 1953). Super's (1953) theory identified the career stages as "growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and decline" (p. 189). Super's model of career stages provided a framework for Huberman's (1993) exploration of the career life cycles of teachers. Although the research occurred with high school teachers in Switzerland, Brunetti (2006) considered the study a seminal work on the trajectory of teachers' careers.

A number of studies grounded in Huberman's life history approach explored teacher attitudes and perceptions about teaching during a specific career stage. Brunetti's (2001, 2006) mixed methods studies with high school secondary teachers explored teacher perceptions of school contexts asking many of the same questions as Huberman. Marston et al. (2004) extended Brunetti's research on late career teachers to explore similarities and differences in perspectives between elementary and secondary teachers and revealed differences in their orientation to subject fields and focus on collegial relationships. The significance of early

experiences identified by Chapman (1984) and diverse perspectives of teachers at specific career stages (Brunetti 2001, 2006) highlight internal circumstances pointing to changes in organizational structure (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Another application of social learning theory focused on cognitive processes resulting from successful performance in the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher self-efficacy surfaced as a central theoretical framework in studies examining teacher commitment and teacher effectiveness. Initially based in social learning theory, self-efficacy consists of psychological changes occurring through cognitive processes based on successful performance of a given behavior (Bandura, 1977). People base their willingness to engage in certain experiences on a belief about their potential for success (Bandura, 1995). Perceived self-efficacy or confidence in succeeding determines how long and how much work people put into accomplishing certain tasks and whether they will take on challenges (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy develops through engaging in successful experiences, seeing peers succeed, achieving success with structured undertakings, and calming emotions before attempting behavior (Bandura, 1977).

Bandura established a teacher efficacy theory for understanding human behavior and learning (Hoy, Tarter, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2006). Teacher efficacy researchers make a distinction between "general teaching efficacy" and "personal teaching efficacy" (Coladarci, 1992; Hoy & Spero, 2005). While general teaching efficacy involves a belief in teaching to achieve certain outcomes, personal teaching efficacy consists of an individual's confidence to engage in behaviors and achieve specific outcomes (Coladarci, 1992; Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Based on a previously established relationship between teacher efficacy and willingness to remain in teaching, Eckert (2012) used a mixed methods approach to examine whether teacher qualifications obtained in TEP could predict efficacy and retention of novice teachers in high poverty/high minority schools. Although unable to establish predictive potential based on teaching qualifications, Eckert established a connection between retention and teacher efficacy for novice teachers.

Several researchers examined how changes in efficacy developed through persistence and successful experiences for student teachers, novice teachers, and non-African American teachers in urban schools (Knoblauch & Woolfolk Hoy, 2008; Payne, 1994; Tucker et al., 2005). The studies used one of many standardized instruments to measure efficacy and statistical analysis to determine results.

Limitations in the Literature

Researchers examined teacher retention using various theoretical frameworks and methods to gain insight into the phenomenon. While the theoretical frameworks add to knowledge about retention of teachers in high-need schools, they contain several overarching limitations. The first limitation involved the reliance on survey data of employee turnover within the organizational perspective. The survey data collected using closed-ended questions reflecting one point in time restricted the information gained. A qualitative approach may help to explore the process involved in career decisions to gain a deeper understanding of teacher commitment to continue in high-need schools.

A second limitation involved focusing on reasons teachers leave implying that altering these conditions will increase retention. Individuals vary on what they find satisfying in their job (Mobley, 1982). For example, Swars et al. (2009) found teachers differed on the importance

placed on their relationship with administration. Some teachers wanted more attention and contact with principals while other teachers had no interest in increased contact with the principal (Swars et al., 2009). Another example of this surfaced in a number of studies referring to salaries as reasons teachers left (Certo & Fox, 2002; Darling-Hammond, 2003; Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003); other researchers found monetary incentives attracted but did not retain committed teachers (Berry, 2008; Firestone & Pennell, 1993; Petty et al., 2012).

A third limitation occurred in compartmentalizing aspects of career decision-making within a social learning theory to predict retention or attrition. Although the importance of initial commitment and early experiences remain undisputed, isolating these elements restricted implications. Limited teacher retention success suggests an integrated approach considering the interplay of various factors in the lived experiences of teachers in high-need schools.

A fourth limitation involves the difficulty in establishing a body of knowledge when researchers hold different conceptualizations for the constructs under investigation. Even when the construct under investigation appeared the same, definitions used within the studies varied. For example, each of the four qualitative studies focusing on teacher resilience defined the construct differently.

Lastly, much of the qualitative literature reviewed employed a variety of theories to frame the research with little overlap between studies. The wide range of theories inhibits developing a body of knowledge regarding teacher retention in high-need schools. Lacking attempts to validate and build upon theories provides little consensus or insight into understanding teacher retention with potential for change.

Gaps in the literature on teacher retention critically important to high-need schools included: 1) the role of motivation and 2) elementary teachers' perspectives. Within the context

of career decisions, researchers focused on job satisfaction and neglected the role of intrinsic motivation on teacher career decisions. Examining teacher retention through the lens of motivation suggests a strong interest in service attracts teachers to the profession (Lortie, 1975). People with a strong interest in service typically focus on dedication and giving rather than money, status, and power (Lortie, 1975; Yee, 1990). The culture of teaching influences the kind of reward system tending toward psychic rewards gained through daily instructional achievements with students (Lortie, 1975). Since teachers working in high poverty urban schools may experience infrequent psychic rewards, exploring sources of motivation in these schools may lead to higher retention of quality teachers.

Researchers also neglected to include the perspectives of elementary teachers in high poverty schools. The only study with urban elementary teachers examined components causing teachers to stay past five years (Waddell, 2010). Waddell's (2010) study included urban schools with unknown student demographics and teacher retention up to six years. The few studies focused on resiliency in high-need schools occurred exclusively in high schools leaving a gap in the literature for elementary teachers.

Motives for teaching differ for elementary and secondary teachers (Lortie, 1975). Lortie (1975) found elementary teachers wanted to work with students while secondary teachers loved their subject matter. Lortie (1975) claimed elementary teachers were attracted to working with children "under normal conditions that don't include sickness, poverty, or emotional disturbance" (p. 27). Motives of elementary teachers working with disadvantaged students in high poverty urban schools differ from secondary teachers and those described by Lortie.

The scholarly literature on teacher retention resulted in contradictions and confusion over how to improve retention, and gaps in the literature overlook areas with potential for increasing

understanding of teacher retention in high-need schools. Exploring theoretical frameworks used by researchers sheds light on how researchers approached the issue of teacher retention and provides an opportunity to consider innovative approaches. Using large-scale quantitative studies, scholars focused on organizational characteristics driving turnover, clarifying the dilemma and identifying policy implications. The career theory framework considered factors influencing individual teacher career decisions using statistical analysis of survey data to develop predictions of retention. Researchers also used career theory framework in mixed method studies to gain teacher perspectives on their profession. Teacher efficacy researchers employed mixed methods increasing knowledge about developing efficacy and improving retention.

High-need schools as organizations consist of environments characterized by high teacher turnover and a struggle to alter this pattern (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Howard, 2003). Changing a pattern within organizations in constant flux and transformation requires a holistic approach (Morgan, 2006). Limitations and gaps within the literature support the need for more research and require innovative approaches to address these issues. Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986, 1997) and Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frame model of organizations form the theoretical framework for my study.

Analytic Theory Relating to Commitment to Teach in High-Need Schools

Theories offer insight and clarity about a phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). Conceptual frameworks within theories assist in understanding connections between data and relevance to the research question (Maxwell, 2013). Two theories formed the theoretical framework for exploring how the experiences of veteran teachers in high-need schools affected their commitment to continuing service in high poverty schools: self-efficacy and four frame organizational model. Self-efficacy theory provided a lens into how human beliefs and thoughts

influence behavior. The four frame organizational model offered a perspective of organizational factors influencing teacher commitment to stay. I provide more in-depth details of each theory, beginning with self-efficacy theory.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory emerged from Albert Bandura's application of learning principles to explain how people processed information about social experiences and how their thinking guided behavior (Grusec, 1992). Bandura later identified his approach "social cognitive theory" to highlight the central involvement of cognitive processes in human behavior (Grusec, 1992, p. 777). Social cognitive theory asserts the interaction of personal factors including cognition, behavior, and the environment influences human behavior (Bandura, 1986). Self-efficacy influences the way people think about their experiences, the environment they encounter, and behavior they perform (Bandura, 1986). People engage in self-reflective thought evaluating experiences and making judgments about their capability to handle situations successfully (Bandura, 1986). Based on their perception of efficacy, people make decisions about engaging in certain behaviors (Bandura, 1986, 1995). Successes and failures encountered from engaging in behaviors result in continued self-reflection influencing self-efficacy and future behavior (Bandura, 1986). Expectations of success people hold affect the effort and persistence directed toward an activity (Bandura, 1977, 1986). In this way, people exert control over their lives to attain benefits and avoid undesired outcomes (Bandura, 1997).

Four Frame Organizational Model

Organizational theory consists of a number of schools of thought aimed at understanding "how organizations work, how they should work, or why they often fail" containing specific concepts, assumptions, and viewpoints (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 14). Bolman and Deal's

(2008) pragmatic approach incorporates major theoretical perspectives into a comprehensive model addressing various aspects of organizations. This broader view reframes organizational theory incorporating four key perspectives: structural, political, symbolic, and human resource (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The structural frame assumes organizations exist to achieve goals requiring specialized roles, formal policies, procedures, and hierarchies to coordinate functions maximizing performance (Bolman & Deal, 2008). From this perspective, organizational problems occur when the structure created does not fit with the environment or change in conditions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The size, process for converting raw materials into products, vulnerability to external influences, workforce, technology, and goals determine the type of structure needed (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

The political frame presumes organizations consist of individuals and groups with different values and concerns who form coalitions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Limited resources within an organization can create conflict between coalitions, making power essential when negotiating to obtain resources (Bolman & Deal, 2008). "Interdependence, divergent interests, scarcity, and power relations" serve as catalysts for organizational politics (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 194).

The symbolic frame encompasses ideas from several disciplines focusing on the meaning expressed through actions rather than the particular events (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This perspective views organizations as theaters and tribes emphasizing culture, symbols, myths, rituals, and ceremonies as important elements of success (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Problems occur from this viewpoint when "actors don't play their parts…symbols lose their meaning…and rituals lose their potency" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 16).

The core assumptions of the human resource frame claim organizations exist to meet the needs of humans creating a connection between people and organizations in which both benefit equally from the working relationship (Bolman & Deal, 2008). These assumptions place importance on the relationship between people and organizations making it crucial to find ways people can accomplish their work while liking their job (Bolman & Deal, 2008). From this viewpoint, both organizations and workers strive to meet their respective needs, workers look for meaningful work and organizations attempt to find and retain talented employees (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Several different organizational frameworks may contribute to the reasons veteran teachers either stay or leave their schools. I hoped to learn how teachers' perceived their work and how organizational factors affected their decisions to stay or leave a high-need elementary school.

Summary

The findings from my content review of literature and selection of analytical theories form the conceptual framework for my study. I found several gaps in the literature impacting high-need schools, including 1) the role of motivation among teachers working in high-need schools, and 2) the perspectives of elementary teachers absent from the literature, supporting the need for my study. I next describe my research design and the methodology used to conduct my study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used in a study depends on the topic and the researcher's purpose (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Answering my research question required descriptive data from teachers in high-need schools explaining what they found satisfying and how they sustained their commitment. Qualitative research proved useful in examining the perspectives of my study participants, the contexts within which they worked, and complexities of their situation (Creswell, 2012). Consequently, I employed qualitative research to address my research question. In this chapter, I explain the methodology selected and details involved in conducting the study to address my research question.

Qualitative Research

Considering the selection of qualitative research, I reflected on basic philosophical assumptions underlying my research question. To understand the motivation and commitment of teachers in challenging schools, I gathered data "through the eyes" of teachers who chose to stay. Epistemological assumptions require getting close to those studied to gain knowledge (Creswell, 2012). I believed these teachers held untapped information. I assumed veteran teachers choosing to teach in challenging schools possessed valuable information within their lived experiences. Qualitative research assumes context influences behavior (Bodgan & Biklen, 2007), and therefore, to obtain information about teachers' lived experiences, I conducted my study with teachers in their school environment.

Ontological assumptions within qualitative research recognize the complex nature of reality and need for multiple sources (Creswell, 2012). From an ontological perspective, qualitative research provided a way to capture diverse perspectives. Using participants' words in

my study, I preserved their meaning (Creswell, 2012). I assumed teachers constructed their own reality based on their experiences in schools. I reasoned teachers' experiences varied based on their teaching role, job responsibilities, and position; and these different perspectives would in turn shed light on the complexities of teacher commitment to working in high poverty schools. I focused on how participants' interpreted these experiences leading to continued commitment to their work in high-need schools. Qualitative research focuses on gaining insight into the meaning participants' hold of their experiences and in turn, how this meaning influences their behavior (Maxwell, 2013).

My intent to learn from teachers about their experience required a research method with some flexibility for modification. Qualitative research uses a structured but flexible design, allowing modifications to explore new findings uncovered during a study (Maxwell, 2013). The emergent design of qualitative research allowed for minor shifts in questions, sites visited, and individuals studied to obtain the information needed (Creswell, 2012). Using an interactive qualitative research approach, I adjusted questions if needed to obtain a deeper, more complete understanding of a teacher's motivation and commitment.

Qualitative research provided me the opportunity to gather rich descriptions of teachers' experiences through in-depth interviewing to gain insight into the meaning constructed from these experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Specifically, I adopted a phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry for the purpose of exploring the experiences and meaning of teachers' work influencing continued commitment to teach in high-need schools.

Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach originated with Edmund Husserl, a German mathematician; several philosophers expanded on his work (Creswell, 2012). Phenomenology

emerged as a philosophy and qualitative research approach (Merriam, 2002) resulting from the dissatisfaction with philosophical assumptions of science at the time (Moustakas, 1994). A key focus in phenomenology involves the relationship between human consciousness and objects in peoples' lives (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology views the consciousness and content of consciousness as inseparable (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Investigating the content of consciousness in phenomenology involves taking experiences or phenomenon as people view them (Stewart & Mickunas, 1974). Applying principles of phenomenology, researchers work to refrain from judgments about the subject seeking descriptions of experiences and meaning rather than explanations (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research seeks to understand how people make meaning of everyday experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Phenomenology aims to identify the essence of an experience emerging from subjective experiences of a group of individuals (Merriam, 2002).

Selection of the type of qualitative approach used depends on the purpose of the study and research questions (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). I aimed to explore how teachers in high-need schools interpreted lived experiences to create meaning of their work resulting in continued commitment to work in high-need schools. Phenomenological inquiry supports understanding a number of individuals' common experience of a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, phenomenological research generates rich, detailed, accurate descriptions of experiences individuals faced with a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994) primarily through interviews (Creswell, 2012). Veteran teachers choosing to teach in challenging schools held valuable information within their lived experiences about the established mind-sets, power bases, and existing practices within their schools. Addressing my research question, I needed to gather descriptive data from individual teachers about their perceptions and experiences in high poverty schools.

Phenomenological inquiry best fit the purpose of capturing the common lived experiences of veteran teachers who sustained commitment in high-need schools to understand the essence of the experience.

Adopting a phenomenological approach, I followed methods of preparation, data collection, and data analysis established by psychologist Moustakas (1994). Ultimately, I identified the essence of the phenomenon through an intuitive-reflective process of repeated examinations of different perspectives and reflection (Moustakas, 1994).

Institutional Review Board

I gained permission to conduct my study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of St. Thomas (Appendix A). The IRB process included describing the purpose, procedures, research questions, and safeguards for participants involved in my study. I then obtained permission from the school district in which I conducted my study (Appendix B for school district approval). After gaining school district approval, I gained verbal approval from principals to interview teachers in their school.

Ethical Considerations

Conducting research involving the participation of people requires considerations of ethical issues regarding the appropriateness of the research design, methods and reporting results (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). I describe the ethical considerations presented in this section in greater detail in later sections. During the initial meeting with potential participants, I explained the purpose, risks, and benefits of the study. I reviewed the consent form addressing efforts made to ensure confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of the study with teachers interested in participating. Interviews did not begin until I assessed the potential participants understanding of the study and obtained written consent.

Efforts to ensure confidentiality and minimize risks to participants included changing the name of teachers, schools, and the school district. I stored data and transcriptions of interviews on my password-protected personal computer to prevent others from accessing it and erased all recorded interviews following transcription. Additionally, I plan to destroy all documents and data from my computer six months after the successful defense of my dissertation.

Sampling Method and Rationale

I conducted my study within a large school district located in an urban community comprised of a number of Pre-K-5 and Pre-K-8 schools serving a high percentage of students living in poverty. Selecting a district consisting of many high poverty schools increased the possibility of finding teachers experiencing the phenomenon, an essential criteria for participants in phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994). Within this school district, I limited my study to elementary teachers in Pre-K-5 and Pre-K-8 schools because of the gap identified in the literature of qualitative studies in teacher turnover and retention at elementary high poverty schools.

Purposeful sampling involved selecting research sites facilitating exploration of the phenomenon under investigation (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). For this reason, participants included teachers who worked in Pre-K-5 and Pre-K-8 schools with a high percentage of students living in poverty. Because my study focused on how the experiences of teachers in high-need schools influenced commitment to continue their work, I used a criterion sampling. Creswell (2012) recommended a criterion sampling to ensure that individuals in a study have experienced the phenomenon. In criterion sampling, participants selected should meet specific criteria established by the researcher (Creswell, 2012). Participants in my study were required to have 10 years of experience teaching and more than three of their 10 years in the current school.

Sample size for participants in phenomenological studies varies greatly (Polkinghorne, 1989), but should assure enough data for a pattern to emerge (Dukes, 1984) while achieving data saturation (Bazeley, 2013). Generally, Dukes (1984) recommended studies include three to 10 participants depending on the procedures used in the research. I interviewed 15 experienced teachers holding different positions in schools including classroom teachers, specialists (e.g. art, physical education), content specialists, and teacher leaders (e.g. mentors). I limited my study to elementary teachers in Pre-K-8 and Pre-K-5 schools with the exception of an English Language Learner (ELL) lead teacher who spent a limited amount of time working with a small number of middle school ELL teachers. The participant did not work with middle school students directly and all prior classroom experience was in an elementary classroom.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Participant Recruitment

After gaining IRB approval and district approval, I identified high-need Pre-K-5 and Pre-K-8 schools with "at least 80%" of their students (Petty et al., 2012, p. 70) "eligible for free or reduced priced meals" (Petty et al., 2011, p. 2). I attempted to contact 15 principals of the schools identified to gain approval to recruit teachers on their staff to participate in the study. Three principals did not respond to my request to recruit in their school. Twelve principals arranged for me to present my research study information to their staff through either a staff meeting or email. Teachers volunteered for the study from seven of the twelve schools permitting recruitment of staff.

Contacting principals, I explained the purpose, criteria, and expectations for participants in my study and asked to attend a staff meeting to initiate recruitment. During the staff meeting in schools, I presented information about the study and left contact information (Appendix C) for

teachers interested in participating. Some schools primarily relied on email communication rather than staff meetings, and, in those schools, the principal included information about my study for teachers who might be interested in participating (Appendix C).

After a potential participant initiated contact, I met face-to face or spoke over the phone to explain the purpose, risks, and benefits of the study. Providing participants with information regarding the purpose of the study, obtaining informed consent, assuring confidentiality, and outlining responsibilities of the researcher and participant supported ethical principles in human research (Moustakas, 1994). I informed potential participants of the voluntary nature of the study, explained the option of declining to answer any interview question, and the ability to withdraw from the study to insure they did not feel pressured. I met with teachers interested in participating to provide a more detailed explanation of the study, review safeguards in place to ensure confidentiality, discuss the consent form (Appendix D), and answer questions. Following the discussion and prior to consent, I asked the following four questions to confirm the participant understood the process.

1. How would you describe the purpose and benefits of this study?
2. How will confidentiality be assured throughout the study and in any published reports?
3. How would you describe the voluntary nature of the study?
4. Who could be contacted with further questions?

After assessing the participant's understanding and willingness to participate, I reviewed the consent form (Appendix D). Interviews took place after obtaining the participant's signature on the consent form.

Participant Selection

Attempts to recruit teachers resulted in 15 teachers participating in the study from seven high poverty Pre-K-5 and Pre-K-8 schools in an urban school district. Student demographics of all schools in the study included a high percentage of students living in families with income at or below levels eligible for free or reduced priced meals. Differences between schools also existed. Three schools served Pre-K-5 and four schools served Pre-K-8 grade students. Student ethnic demographics also varied between schools. Overall, the seven schools located in different neighborhoods in the city resulted in data from at least one school in each of the three school district areas.

Building size and architecture differentiated the schools. Two multi-storied, old, brick schools with wood floors and large windows posed a prominent, imposing presence in their respective neighborhoods. Three of the schools with similar architectural designs resided in different areas of the city. These schools had wide hallways and stairwells, large windows letting in natural light from outside, and air conditioning lacking in the older schools. Although the three schools appeared large from the outside, the design limited the amount of space useful for teaching. Narrower stairwells, smaller windows, and masonry walls in the hallways provided distinguishing features in a two-story small school located in an impoverished residential area of the city. Conspicuous in size and architectural style, another school sprawled over a large area distinguishing itself from the other schools.

Location of schools provided other differences. Two schools resided in quiet neighborhoods surrounded by well-maintained, attractive homes. Another school was located near a busy street lined with commercial buildings and stately homes in a vibrant community. Four schools were situated in changing and economically challenged residential neighborhoods.

Five schools located in residential communities surrounded by homes and apartments had access to city parks.

Despite differences in appearances and locations, all of the schools possessed Promethean Boards in the classroom, up-to-date district curriculum, and computer labs for student use. Similar to other schools today, staff monitored entry into the building for security reasons. All of the schools appeared clean and well maintained. Space remained limited in all schools and most teachers not assigned a classroom shared a workspace with other teachers or a classroom teacher. Teachers' classrooms or workspaces often included items from their homes such as rocking chairs, posters or wall hangings, and lamps in an attempt to make a more comfortable, welcoming environment.

Participants all had at least 10 years of experience teaching with more than three of the 10 years in the current school. The teaching assignments represented a range of positions found in urban elementary schools including classroom teachers, specialist (e.g. art, physical education), content specialists, and teacher leaders (e.g. mentors). Participants consisted of six classroom teachers representing all grades except grade four, three math specialists, one ELL teacher, one ELL lead teacher, one special education classroom teacher, one specialist, one math interventionist, and one co-teacher. A number of teachers working outside the classroom identified their role as a teacher leader. All participants with the exception of an ELL lead teacher worked exclusively with K-5 students. The ELL lead teacher spent a portion of time working with a small number of middle school ELL teachers, but did not work with middle school students directly and had prior elementary classroom experience. The number of years of teaching experience ranged from 11 to 28 and years in the current school ranged from four to 24. Table 1 illustrates background information for each of the participants.

Pseudonym	Position	Years in Teaching	Years in Current School
Kim	co-teacher	26	5
Ava	math specialist	23	4
Tom	Gr. 5 classroom teacher	12	4
Mia	Gr. 3 classroom teacher	23	23
Grace	Gr. 5 classroom teacher	17	4
Ellie	Gr. 2 classroom teacher	28	24
Sofia	ELL teacher Kindergarten	14	4
Ruby	ELL lead teacher	25	7
Jade	math interventionist	14	4
Lucy	specialist	15	8
Julia	math specialist	16	8
Ivy	Gr. 1 classroom teacher	21	8
Barb	math specialist	18	8
Doris	Special Education classroom teacher	12	9
Dave	K classroom teacher	11	8

Table 1. Participants

Data Collection

Establishing a process of data collection required consideration of the type of interview that would yield helpful information (Creswell, 2012). I conducted semi-structured interviews with veteran teachers working in high-need schools using open-ended questions to provide opportunities for teachers to share their work experiences. Interviews provided an opportunity to observe participants, to discover how they interpreted experiences, and to get a glimpse into their past (Weiss, 1994). Through interviews, I gathered information about how experiences, beliefs, and values guided their work, what factors influenced their commitment, and how they sustained their commitment. I intended to explore how teaching in high-need schools affected views on teaching and the meaning teaching in a high-need school held for these teachers.

Interviews

I used information gained during my pilot study to modify questions to best fit my study and improve interviewing techniques. A pilot study assisted in refining data collection and

questions (Creswell, 2012). Following McCracken's (1988) four part process of inquiry, I used major domains emerging from a literature review in conjunction with the research question and supporting questions to develop interview questions (Appendix E). In preparation for interviews, I created an interview protocol form (Appendix F). Interview protocols or guides contain core questions and places to record details about the interview (Creswell, 2012). Although I did not take detailed notes during the interview, the protocol assisted in organizing and maintaining records of interviews. Interview protocols helped to maintain a focus on what the participant said and to probe for further understanding (Charmaz, 2006).

After the participant provided signed consent, I conducted individual interviews approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Moustakas' (1994) methodological procedures called for recording long interviews with possible follow-up interviews when necessary. I contacted and met with two participants after the initial interview to follow-up with clarifying questions that surfaced. I attempted to contact a third participant to ask a question not addressed during the initial interview due to time constraints, but I did not receive a response. Information obtained from the initial meeting with this participant provided sufficient information to include in my study. Whenever possible the interviews took place in teachers' classrooms, however, to ensure privacy some interviews occurred in a different room within the school. Although aware of their option to withdraw from the study, no participants selected to do so.

I audiotaped the in-depth interviews with consent from participants to guarantee accurate data collection and representation. Because verbatim translations provided accurate representations of the recorded interviews, I did not return the data to participants for validation or member checks (Bazeley, 2013). Following the interview, I downloaded the audiotape onto my password-protected personal computer saving the recording under a pseudonym. I kept the

recorded and transcribed interviews on my password-protected personal computer with names of interviewees changed to protect anonymity. I placed all documentation such as consent forms, data protocols, and master lists in a locked file to restrict access of other people. I plan to destroy all confidential documents and erase all transcriptions and data from my computer six months after the successful defense of my dissertation. I took precautions to minimize risks including changing the names of participants, schools, and school district. Although minimal risks existed for participants, I made every attempt to safeguard identities avoiding distinguishing events, situations, or descriptions. Additional protection of confidentiality for participants included restricting access to data to my dissertation chair, Dr. Sarah Noonan and myself.

I adopted McCracken's (1988) four stage long interview approach consisting of "1) review of analytic categories 2) review of cultural categories 3) discovery of cultural categories 4) discovery of analytical categories" (p. 29). Interview procedures call for biographical questions to obtain descriptive details of each participant's life allowing them to become comfortable sharing their story (McCracken, 1988). At this time, I inquired about the participant's teaching history, initial interest in teaching, influences in their current work, and a description of commitment. After establishing rapport through this initial step, I asked broad questions called "grand-tour" questions (Spradley, 1979, p. 86) aimed at gathering data on teacher retention and listening for key expressions to pursue. Through career, organizational, and commitment questions, I obtained data on personal and organizational factors influencing participants' motivation and commitment to work in high poverty schools. To encourage participant's discourse in an unobtrusive manner, I included non-verbal cues or "floating prompts" (McCracken, 1988, p. 35).

Over the course of my study, I relied on the interview questions to provide structure and order while I pursued unanticipated responses emerging during the interview process (McCracken, 1998). I continued interviewing until I achieved data saturation. This occurred when the information obtained repeated itself and no new information surfaced (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Fieldnotes and Memos

The use of fieldnotes during interviews helped capture "sights, smells, impressions, and remarks said before and after the interview" (Bogdan & Biklin, 2007, p. 119). This added depth to the data collected. I carried a notebook to interviews to record a description of the interview environment, impressions of the participant and interview, and events occurring before or after the interview. I made notes immediately in the notebook to assure accuracy and later transferred them into the transcribed interview.

Memo writing assisted reflection, thinking, and the development of ideas during the research process (Maxwell, 2013). The method for writing useful memos depends on the individual researcher (Charmaz, 2006). My memos ranged from brief comments on interviews to extensive writing and served as ways to get thoughts on paper, stimulate thinking, and develop ideas about a topic or study (Maxwell, 2013). I found memo writing helped clarify thoughts, explore theories, reflect on impressions from interviews, and consider themes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves systematically working with all the data collected to come up with findings (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). In phenomenological research containing interviews, picking up on subtle nuances in speech and intonation can get lost in the written text (Bazeley, 2013). Transcribing interviews also allows the researcher to become familiar with the data (Bazeley,

2013). I transcribed the data myself to pick up on emotional tones and pauses, and to gain a general impression that I then recorded in my research journal. After completing the transcriptions, I reviewed and edited each transcript to ensure accuracy. I took general notes during this review to identify big, broad ideas occurring in the interviews. Listening to interviews, transcribing, and writing memos based on the interviews launched my data analysis process (Maxwell, 2013).

Rereading each transcript again, I began initial coding of significant statements in a word document using the option available for tracking comments in the margin. Initial coding included all statements using the exact words of participants to avoid changing the meaning (Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Through this initial coding of every word, phrase, and sentence in the transcript, "units of general meaning" emerged (Hycner, 1985, p. 282). I reread each transcript a third time writing observer comments throughout the interviews and at the end. Observer comments provided an opportunity to reflect and speculate on the data leading to insight as the research evolves (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

I created a study in HyperRESEARCH to store, retrieve, and facilitate coding of transcribed interview data. Referring to initial codes and interview data, I reviewed transcripts again to identify statements relevant to the research question (Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). At this point, a reduction in codes occurred. I then moved on to determine statements or codes fitting together and organized groups or clusters. Creating themes involved a process of going back and forth between significant statements and the transcript (Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Themes consisted of slightly abstract phrases reflecting important comments grounded in the transcript (Beazley, 2013). I established common themes across cases after completion of the individual analysis. Some initial common themes emerging included student behavior, engaging

parents, organizational factors, and coping. I continued to compare data, develop categories, sort, and resort until I identified the collective meaning (Bazeley, 2013). Finding themes common across most participant data represented the essence of the sustaining commitment in high-need schools (Hycner, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). Identification of common themes across the participants' experiences resulted in understanding the experience of teachers and contexts influencing their continued commitment to work in high-need schools.

After identifying themes to describe the "essence" of participant experience, I used prior research literature to support or counter findings. I used Bandura's self-efficacy theory (1986, 1997) and Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frame model of organizations to analyze data. This process must meet criteria for validity and reliability in qualitative research.

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Research

Reliability in quantitative research relies on replicating findings across studies assuming this legitimizes the findings (Merriam, 1995). The nature of qualitative research seeks to understand human perspectives and behaviors that vary, making replication of results problematic (Merriam, 1995). For this reason, reliability in qualitative research aims to achieve consistency between the data collected and results of the study or "internal reliability" (Merriam, 1995, p. 57). Three reliability strategies included triangulation, peer examination, and audit trail (Merriam, 2002). Triangulation involved using different methods, data sources, or different perspectives of events to substantiate conclusions (Fielding & Fielding, 1986). I used triangulation of data from teachers holding different positions including classroom teachers, specialist (e.g. art, physical education), content specialists, and teacher leaders in various high-need schools to insure reliability and validity.

Peer examination or review occurred through meetings and conference calls with my dissertation chair (Merriam, 2002). I used these discussions to clarify questions about the research processes, confer about findings, and explore theories (Merriam, 2002). Additional peer examination and review occurred from committee members' review and feedback of my dissertation and final defense.

I also kept a research journal establishing an audit trail to support my research conclusions and credibility (Bazeley, 2013). This audit trail consisted of memos written as well as a research journal. Within the research journal, I kept notes regarding decisions made concerning data collection, coding, and changes in themes. Transparency provided about the process, details about data analysis, interpretation and conclusions allow others to trust the research (Bazeley, 2013).

Evaluating validity requires consideration of assumptions and purpose of qualitative research (Merriam, 1995). Seeking to understand a phenomenon experienced by humans with undefined variables called for a qualitative approach (Merriam, 1995). Assuming reality as "constructed and interpreted" not "fixed and stable," qualitative research relies on internal validity (Merriam, 1995, p. 53). Validity relies on the strength of the argument and its clarity and comprehensiveness (Bazeley, 2013). I considered direct quotes and ideas generated from the data a valid reflection of the experiences of teachers and did not request participant feedback for validation. Differences identified through respondent validation do not necessarily invalidate other interpretations (Bazeley, 2013). Finding corroborating evidence across teacher interviews, I established themes.

Another approach to ensuring validity included identifying my assumptions, experiences, beliefs, and theories to examine how they might influence my study (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam,

2002; Patton, 1990). The central role researchers play as instruments in qualitative research make their credibility important when evaluating validity (Patton, 1990). I identified my long history of work in high-need schools and experience with the impact of teacher turnover. My personal and professional disclosures helped shed light on the topic and provided distance (McCracken, 1998). Another validation strategy involved clarifying my bias from the outset of the study (Creswell, 2012). In phenomenological research, bracketing or suspending researcher prejudgments helps preserve the participant's meaning reducing bias (Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). Throughout the study, I used memos and reflection in a concerted effort to keep assumptions and preconceptions from biasing the collection and interpretation of data (Hycner, 1985).

Summary

I explored the experiences of veteran teachers working in high-need schools and their commitment to serving economically disadvantaged students using qualitative research. Using phenomenological inquiry, I obtained descriptive data from teachers in high-need schools about what they found satisfying and how they sustained their commitment. A phenomenological approach resulted in a deeper understanding of the experience (Polkinghorne, 1989). Next, I share findings emerging from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

FACTORS SUPPORTING TEACHER COMMITMENT TO SERVING ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGE STUDENTS

Determining how veteran teachers experience their work holds potential for understanding what fosters dedication and retention of teachers in high-need schools. In this chapter, I describe the factors influencing and favoring teacher commitment in their work in high-need schools.

The factors favoring commitment to their work must outweigh the factors undermining teacher commitment. Based on my research, I found three factors increased teacher commitment and satisfaction in their work: (1) relationships, (2) professionalism, and (3) values and a history of service within high need schools. A powerful motivator, relationships with students, colleagues, and families served as an intrinsic reward to teachers. Teacher satisfaction increased through positive interactions with others. Teacher and student interactions often led to student growth – a key source of satisfaction for teachers and students.

Relationships

Teacher-Student Relationships

Six of 15 participants described the satisfaction gained through relationships with students. Long-term relationships with former students allowed teachers to see they made a difference in the lives of students. When teachers were contacted by former students, they believed the contacts and exchanges signaled their strong connection with students. Ruby, now an ELL lead teacher, felt delight when a student she taught 11 years ago contacted her. Ruby's contacts with former students confirmed the bond and strong connection she developed with her students.

According to Mia, the third grade teacher, lasting relationships developed in her classroom with some students symbolized success. The reciprocal nature of these relationships between teacher and students caused Mia to describe these students as "memorable." During their visits with Mia, former students shared classroom memories. The exchange of memories showed Mia her significant impact on students. Mia felt fulfilled by these mutually beneficial relationships.

Former students recalled specific classroom activities, assuring teachers that their time and effort put into teaching mattered. Julia, currently a first grade math specialist, identified feeling thrilled when, years later, students remembered things they experienced in her first grade classroom. Recollections from former students reminded Ruby of the students she "touched."

Sofia, the ELL teacher, described feelings of fulfillment and accomplishment through an encounter with a former student's child who enrolled in her school. Whenever she saw her former student, Sofia felt a sense of pride. She would say, "I taught that girl…and look at her daughter!" Sofia's former English language learner student became proficient in English and raised a bi-lingual child, attesting to the transformational capacity of teaching within one generation.

A longstanding relationship with a student provided Ellie, a second grade teacher, with an opportunity to support this former student through several junctures. Ellie felt honored and gratified when this former student decided to become a teacher. The student returned to work with Ellie, fulfilling the teacher practicum and student teaching requirements. Now a teacher, this former student later returned to become a teacher in Ellie's school. The on-going relationship between Ellie and a former student provided a lot of satisfaction from seeing the student's career launched. Ellie felt she "had a little bit to do with that."

Positive relationships with current students improved rapport between teachers and students, affecting the teachers' sway in the classroom. Mia and Lucy recognized the power of mentoring in developing relationships with students in their classrooms. Lucy, a specialist who taught students one hour a week, found it difficult to establish relationships until she joined the school's mentoring program. Each year, Lucy selected a few students to mentor, forming relationships to foster positive interactions with students.

Grace, a fifth grade teacher, viewed trusting relationships critical to student learning and her success as a teacher. Grace derived satisfaction from knowing students felt safe in her classroom to express "how they feel [and] to make mistakes." Grace believed trusting relationships between teachers and students encouraged persistence amidst mistakes, helping her achieve the ultimate goal of increasing student learning.

Connections to students affected teachers' motivation for staying at a school. Ava, the fifth grade math specialist, stayed because of her conviction that students in her school needed dedicated, effective teachers. Ava worried about what might happen if she left the school because she questioned whether anyone else could do what she did for her students. Ruby and Ava thought teachers stayed in their school because they felt students needed them.

Despite daily classroom challenges in her special education classroom and periodic thoughts of changing schools, Doris' connection to her students drew her back. Because of her relationships with students, Doris felt invested in them and worried about maintaining the gains made.

Connections with students heightened teachers' pleasure and joy at work. Tom, the fifth grade teacher, described enjoying interactions with students and watching them grow every day. Concern about his students' future motivated Tom to want to come to school every day. Tom

referred to "kind of [adopting] these kids," revealing a deep personal commitment to his students.

Sofia enjoyed her relationships and everyday interactions with students. Describing her work with students, Sofia talked about loving "the little kids… [and] the funny ways they say my name." This memory revealed a caring, intimate relationship between Sofia and her students.

Parent-Teacher Relationships

The importance of relationships with students linked teachers to their families, particularly parents. Teachers looked to parents for support, recognizing the critical role parents played in their children's lives and education. Relationships with parents affected teachers positively, when parents trusted and valued teachers. For example, teaching a number of children from the same family caused teachers to view this as a sign of parental approval. Tom felt gratified when children from the same family attended his class over the years because this signaled parents' trust in his teaching.

Likewise, Ellie explained parental requests to place their children in her classroom showed their support – particularly when she had taught an older sibling. Consequently, Ellie felt parents trusted her with their children, teaching "literally multiple generations" in her classroom. Parental faith in her teaching fueled Ellie's desire to stay.

Relationships with parents affected teachers positively when they expressed trust and provided support. Comparing different experiences of parental engagement, Grace viewed her current situation as "just perfect." Grace welcomed the trust conveyed to her from parents when they responded to her requests for volunteers. Relationships with parents in her current school showed Grace they valued her work with their children.

Relationships with parents helped teachers engage important persons in their students' lives in the educational process. Ava believed that knowledge gained from positive relationships between teachers and parents helped parents understand and support her expectations for their children. Tom worked to establish a bond with parents early in the school year through positive exchanges knowing many "didn't have a positive time in school so they don't wanna *[sic]* be here." He felt these early interactions put parents at ease communicating with him and garnered their support. Tom believed positive messages about the importance of education needed to occur to motivate students to excel in his classroom.

Sofia found ways of "building community with family" to support education at home by engaging parents. Sofia partnered with parents to extend learning into the students' homes using any resources available. Likewise, Julia reasoned parents at her school wanted to help their children with schoolwork but lacked knowledge about what they could do to help. Parents felt "very grateful and very excited" when Julia shared ideas on ways to help their child learn at home.

Parent-teacher conferences provided an opportunity for teachers to connect with parents, forming a partnership focused on their child's education. Teachers perceived allies in parents whose participation in conferences showed support and commitment to education. For example, Mia gauged parental support in her school through participation in parent-teacher conferences. Although parent attendance at conferences in past years fell below fifty percent, Mia expressed delight that most families attended conferences this year.

Teacher conferences mutually benefited Dave, a kindergarten classroom teacher, and the parents of his students. Dave gained insight about his students while parents discovered their child's potential for success in school. Conferences provided an occasion for Dave to engage

"the whole family" in supporting education. Dave recognized the parents of his students lacked "positive experiences… with government organizations." Consequently, he worked to establish relationships to ease their anxiety so they could feel comfortable supporting their child in school.

Collegial Relationships

Collegial relationships often helped sustain commitment in high-need schools. These relationships created a caring community, making work enjoyable and providing support to overcome challenges. Nine of 15 participants portrayed caring relationships with co-workers. Lucy perceived younger teachers coming to her for advice with personal problems as an indication of her intimate relationship with co-workers. She derived a sense of satisfaction from feeling needed and valued by colleagues.

Two participants used the term "family" when they talked about their relationship with co-workers. Ellie referred to early years at her school as having a "close-knit family feel…the teachers were all very, very close." Like families, Julia stated at times teachers do not agree with each other but, "it's a family…there's the support, there's concern …we pull together when we need to."

Four participants considered their relationships with coworkers close and personal, more like friends than professional colleagues. Tom regretted losing a "good buddy" who started the same school year and planned to leave. He anticipated feeling very sad because of the future loss of his colleague. Similarly, Tom explained he liked the staff and stayed at the school to avoid disappointing colleagues at work whom he considered friends. Grace did not want to leave because she considered her coworkers "really good friends" and found working with them "fun."

Julia developed a trusting, supportive bond with a co-worker over eight years, and this motivated her to stay at her school. Friendships among teachers extended past the school doors.

Ellie stated, “Even outside of school we’re all friends.” Ellie explained many staff wanted to stay at their school because they felt "lucky" about working with their friends.

Eight of 15 participants described the important role colleagues played in supporting their work in the classroom and sustaining their morale through adversity. For some participants, interactions with co-workers led to getting advice and, at other times, voicing grievances. Participants used words like *commiserating*, *complaining*, and *venting* to describe these interactions with other staff members. Lucy gained comfort knowing other people also struggled in their classrooms through difficult times. Kim, the co-teacher, turned to a grade level team mate to both seek strategies and voice complaints.

Ivy, the first grade teacher, and her team-mate “took turns talking each other into coming back” during challenging times in her initial years at her current school. Even last year, Ivy credited colleagues for supporting her with an extremely challenging classroom of students. Knowing co-workers “have each other’s back” motivated teachers to stay at Ivy’s school.

Grace reflected on early years in high poverty schools. She concluded, “If you had a good team, you could do amazing things.” Grace continued to trust and rely on team-mates. She said, “No one else is [going to] look out for you…- the parents aren’t, [and] the principals are…so bogged down.”

Ava claimed, “You could get through anything… as long as you have strong colleagues.” A strong team of trusted colleagues played an important role for Ava. Ava considered the absence of collegial support “a really lonely place” in which teachers “lose…hope.”

Sofia credited mutually dependent relationships with team-mates for providing a supportive network sustaining her drive to teach. A supportive team helped Sofia weather the

"constant influx, and the constant drain" of conditions that do not change. Sofia attained the greatest satisfaction and did her best teaching working with a team of teachers.

Barb, a fifth grade math specialist, and Julia relied on support from teachers at their school and content specialists from other schools. Grade level teachers from their school understood and related to challenges unique to their site. Content specialists from other schools offered ideas and encouragement related to their specialty area of instruction.

Relationships with colleagues provided teachers a community to support the work they needed to do in high-need schools. The "sense of community" established in Ellie's school through close relationships among teachers helped support and inculcate new staff into the culture. These close-knit relationships in Ellie's school also helped teachers feel empowered to address issues interfering with classroom instruction.

Support from team-mates directly impacted instruction in the classroom. Grace relied on her colleagues to use the district's system for aligning curriculum and assessments in planning instruction for her classroom. She utilized the expertise of other team-mates co-teaching with her to make learning engaging and effective.

Relationships with students, parents, and colleagues buoyed commitment of participants. Participants derived satisfaction knowing they made a difference in their students' lives. Positive relationships with parents and colleagues provided support for teachers to successfully teach students. Participants expressed feeling needed, trusted, and appreciated in these relationships. Satisfaction in teaching also required developing expertise and skills of the profession.

Professionalism

Professional expertise fostered the participant teachers' satisfaction due to increased competency and confidence. Professionalism evolved through professional development,

collaborating with coworkers, and everyday experiences in the classroom. Teachers advanced their classroom practices, increased their understanding of the role, and developed teacher efficacy. Participants felt content and inspired to teach when they could see students learning.

Professionalism developed throughout their careers. A number of participants considered continual learning as a characteristic of the teaching profession. Dave, Barb, and Julia referred to themselves as "lifelong learners." Like other professionals, teachers engage in specialized training. Dave explained many people do not realize the amount of ongoing training teachers received to update and improve their teaching. He stated, "What I'm teaching now isn't what I was teaching eight years ago….my classroom has changed, my techniques have improved, and if it hadn't, then I wouldn't be a teacher and I should be different in five years, too."

Barb reflected on her development as a teacher, claiming that teaching "never gets easier" and learning never ends. She found new ways to approach teaching using strategies acquired through professional development with students. Barb learned from conversations with students in small group to adjust her teaching and enjoyed continually improving her teaching methods.

Julia continued to learn effective instructional strategies through her work with students. Based on work in the classroom, Julia adapted her instruction to address misconceptions or interests of students. Both the students and Julia gained critical knowledge during their interactions.

Professional expertise gained through classroom experience and on-going training increased teachers' confidence and competency. Tom felt successful using methods learned from a reading coach in his school and strategies acquired through advanced degree college classes. The repertoire of instructional strategies gained over 12 years helped Tom feel confident he could "tweak" instruction if needed.

Focusing on the area of mathematics, Barb developed a deeper understanding of the content area, thus sharpening her teaching. Barb stated,

> I feel that I'm at a place where I have enough content knowledge that I can meet the kids where they're at and I can see those sparks every day and I can see the kids realizing, "Oh, yep, I am smart [because] now what was just said to me is making sense and now I can do it."

Student response to instruction validated Barb's self-efficacy and instructional approach.

Ava acknowledged a tremendous amount of professional learning occurred over her years in teaching. She credited the influence of colleagues and learning from experiences in schools for developing expertise as a teacher.

Ellie gained confidence in her teaching over time. She became secure in her teaching from knowing what she did "has been tested and tried and proven and it works." Ellie navigated the school system successfully, took pride in her "spotless record," and no longer worried about making a "misstep." She gained confidence teaching in a high-need school over time.

Continuous learning helped teachers gain tools to feel successful in their profession. Doris knew she needed expertise in alternative curriculum and differentiation when she began teaching in a special education classroom. Supportive co-workers and professional training helped Doris acquire specialized instructional techniques. After nine years, Doris said she, "knew what to do…[and did not] really have to worry about the beginning of the year." She now considered herself a "good teacher."

Teachers transformed from uncertain to confident professionals over the course of their careers. Sofia used the term "shrinking back" to describe herself as a novice. She explained I "catered to whatever anybody else told me to do because I didn't know any better." Sofia recalled a situation when a veteran special education teacher convinced her to refer an entire group of English language students to special education. Although Sofia stated, "I knew they

weren't [in need of special education] in my heart," she lacked the confidence to oppose the seasoned teacher. Sofia acquired strategies, knowledge, and confidence after years of experience to advocate for herself and her students.

Jade, the math interventionist also used the term "shrinking" to describe her internal reaction to more dominant staff when starting at her current school. Kim described self-doubt, uncertainty, and anxiety during her first year teaching leading her to look at other teachers as models to replicate. Over the years, Kim gained self-assurance to develop her "own style of teaching" she now shared with others.

Julia described feeling uncertain in her early teaching years. She explained, "I didn't quite know what [my students] needed…I wasn't sure, I kind of had an inkling of what I thought [students] needed or what was right but I didn't feel confident." Julia attributed years of work in her school for teaching her what students need. Confidence emboldened Julia to advocate for student and classroom needs in her school.

Teachers' perspectives of their responsibilities evolved and expanded for a number of participants over time in the classroom. Early in her career, Mia stated, "I didn't think deeply about the enormous impact a teacher would have on a student…how you have to develop their academic, emotional self…I just looked at it surface-y *[sic]*." Mia learned the importance of getting "to know families, understanding what makes kids tick the way they tick" through her work in the classroom. Mia realized the profession of teaching involved more than opening up a book and imparting knowledge.

Ivy learned the world looked different through the eyes of her first grade students. Young children felt excited on their birthday, at losing a tooth, or hearing a character in a book with the same name. Ivy grew to anticipate these situations and devoted time to letting students

enjoy these milestones. Knowing what her students responded to and enjoyed helped her make instruction meaningful and engaging.

Participants pursued professional growth to concentrate on areas of interest in their career. Sofia valued the leeway provided in her current school to pursue professional learning benefiting her work with English language students. The freedom to work with classroom teachers or with the English language team represented trust in her professional judgment.

Ellie experienced autonomy participating in the start-up of a magnet school early in her career. She described working "ten twelve hours a day" with other teachers to develop the curriculum, establish policies, and teach in the school. Growth as a teacher developed through working with others for seven years in "a blur of…fun, excitement" to establish the learning environment. Independence and collaboration influenced Ellie's professionalism and desire to stay at her school.

New roles stimulated teachers' interest and growth in the profession through opportunities to engage in continual learning and improvement. Ava, a math specialist worked with classroom teachers to develop math content knowledge and instructional practice. Ava focused on strategies to use with teachers who resisted changing their teaching practice. She learned to work patiently to gain the teachers' trust rather than charging in "like a bulldog."

Sofia identified "dis-ease" when adjusting to the English language co-teaching model used in her current school. Sofia felt intimidated when she initiated the additional responsibilities of co-teaching unfamiliar content areas. In retrospect, Sofia believed these challenges provided the growth opportunities needed to increase her repertoire of strategies.

Julia, Jade, and Barb found their new positions as math specialists led to stimulating and motivating learning. Julia increased her repertoire of strategies from engaging in "professional

talk" with math specialists from other schools in the district. The professional development sessions supported Jade's desire to learn more about effective math instruction needed in her math interventionist role.

Barb credited her move from classroom teacher to math specialist position for increasing her specialized knowledge in math. Knowledge gained from regular professional training sessions inspired Barb to learn even more. Barb stated, "I get pretty jazzed, pretty excited when I am learning something new about math …and find myself going on-line and… reading more things on my own." She considered new learning in math "a passion."

The desire to learn from new experiences led Ruby to change teaching positions. Various teaching positions in previous schools helped Ruby remain content because they provided her opportunities to learn something new. When Ruby stopped learning, she described feeling "stagnant." Because Ruby found new opportunities for growth in her position, she did not need to look for a position outside her school.

Consideration of career interests influenced decisions regarding professional growth. Two participants refrained from pursuing advanced degrees in order to control the direction of their career. Sofia did not seek an advanced degree because she wanted to continue working directly with English language students. Ava hesitated completing her administrative degree because of her concern the district would place her in an administrative job. Sofia and Ava expressed concern an advanced degree would threaten their ability to maintain their current teaching roles.

Success with students inspired teachers to continue in the profession and school. Eight of 15 participants described moments working with students they found rewarding as teachers.

Tom appreciated hearing "little phrases" from students such as "that makes sense to me now" or seeing a student who once complained about writing a couple of sentences, write a whole page.

Enjoyment in teaching for Barb came from seeing her work payoff when students excelled. Barb described working with a student who made dramatic strides when taught mathematics in a way the student understood. Barb felt validated about her teaching when students applied and retained concepts.

Lucy expressed great satisfaction when a student surpassed her expectations in completion of a demanding activity. Ivy felt fulfilled when students displayed perseverance, showed effort, and gained confidence from her teaching. Watching students learn sometimes brought tears to Ivy's eyes. Ivy called it "genuine learning…[something] you couldn't have manufactured." Ivy explained how her first grade student stopped after reading a part of a story to explain to her the strategy used to figure out a word. The student's metacognition indicated to Ivy success in cracking the code to reading.

Dave obtained satisfaction from reflecting on academic progress students made over the course of the school year. He stated,

> Seeing kids who come in that can't write their name, to writing several sentences and… being able to do that on their own... same thing with reading. Not knowing what a word is and then reading at the end of kindergarten.

The satisfaction and confidence students gained and would carry through school provided another source of pride for Dave.

Julia's gratification in teaching stemmed from seeing how struggling first grade math students learned. Growth in math skills enabled students to tackle grade level math without "dumbing down the work" or modifying expectations. Student success with math assigned in

low poverty schools assured Julia that with instruction her students could perform at a high academic level.

Two participants found students' demonstrating responsibility in the classroom professionally fulfilling. Mia felt satisfied when students "[took] some ownership of their own learning" through inquiring, questioning, and actively engaging in the learning process. Mia used words like "tremendous" and "exciting" to identify her feelings when "the light bulbs go on in kids." Ellie expressed relief and pleasure when a challenging group of students began to "gel" as they took responsibility for their classroom jobs. Students' concern over their jobs indicated a personal investment in making their classroom community run smoothly.

Participants described a process of continual growth, increased effectiveness, and confidence in the profession. Professional expertise included teaching skills and enhanced perspective of roles and responsibilities of a teacher. Student progress provided positive feedback to teachers and helped sustain their commitment to teach. Participants also benefited from their history of service in their school. Teachers discovered how to teach, function, and interact within the context of a high poverty school.

Values and a History of Service in High-Need Schools

History of service in high-need schools involves the process of discovering common values and learning how to work successfully in a school over time. Teachers started their work in schools with educational values shaped by their personal experiences. They wanted to teach in a successful school and engage in work they valued. They looked for confirmation of their educational values in school practices. Over time, teachers grew to value their years of service in high-need schools and the progress they made working in these schools. During time spent in high-need schools teachers formed an affiliation with the school, increased skills working with

diverse, high poverty students, and developed a pragmatic outlook regarding their work. Personal experiences predisposed some participants to seek work in high poverty schools.

Four out of 15 participants described personal experiences prior to teaching that shaped their educational philosophy. Their perspective on education facilitated a connection to high poverty schools. Ava explained that her drive to teach in high poverty schools came from experience working in a shelter and adopting two children. Over the course of the adoption process, Ava learned the birth mother who could neither read nor write attended local schools. Ava explained, "Somewhere along the line lots of people failed her… [because the mother's illiteracy restricted her ability to] provide for her children." This life-changing event confirmed Ava's educational philosophy; that all students needed access to high quality education and underprivileged students needed the most skilled teachers.

The value Julia placed on receiving a good education stemmed from growing up in a family who "lived pay check to pay check." This experience provided the foundation for her conviction that "every child has the right to a good education." Julia's commitment originated from her concern that economically disadvantaged students have access to good teachers.

Living in families devoted to service influenced Sofia and Dave's interest in teaching at high-need schools. Sofia came to view teaching as her "calling" after an attempt to follow her father into mission work did not work out. Early experiences with immigrant families through her father's ministry formed a connection to multi-lingual communities. Teaching in a multi-cultural, multi-lingual school fulfilled Sofia's desire to use her gifts and serve where her "heart was set."

The value of public service and giving back to the community conveyed to Dave through his family played a key role in his motivation to teach. Dave became familiar with high poverty

communities during visits to "the projects" with his father who worked in the city's public housing department. Dave's pre-training experiences offered positive encounters in high poverty urban settings preparing him for a career in high-need schools.

Three participants talked about feeling a connection with the school during their job interview. Ruby stated, "I probably knew at the interview…'cause I interviewed all over…and I just… had a hard time making connections…but then here…from the beginning, I knew that I would like it here." Doris immediately liked the appearance of the building and reception from secretaries and administration the day she interviewed in her current school. Sofia also sensed a good fit with the school during the interview. She felt the school offered a comfortable, healthy atmosphere where she could make use of her teaching strengths while growing professionally.

Four participants expressed a strong personal connection and investment linking them with the school. The student demographics in Kim's school matched those of the elementary school she attended in another state. Kim expressed delight in her current school because for 15 years she "was the only Black teacher" who taught very few African American students. In her current school, Kim stated,

> I knew this was my spot. I was just amazed with the number of African American people [emphasis] working here…. Not just the children…I was tickled by the children, I was just happy to see them….Then when I saw the staff, I'm like, "Oh, yes I like this"….I like this diverse staff here. That's what [I] like.

Ellie described getting "strength" from knowing she will always be a teacher, a "[name of school] teacher." Julia explained teaching in her school defined her and could not imagine doing anything else. Tom distinguished teaching in his high poverty school as his "brand," and expressed concern about the school's image because it reflected his work. He identified with the school and focused on "taking care of my own house."

Eight out of 15 participants supported the school's values or vision causing them to feel they belonged. Ruby explained the focus of the English language and bilingual programming in her current school made it feel "like the perfect fit." In this school, Ruby found support for her conviction that "everyone should become bilingual" and support English language learners.

Sofia wanted to work in a school with programming aligned more closely to her educational philosophy. Sofia detected a level of commitment in the school to English language learners that she liked. The school demonstrated a priority placed on meeting the needs of English language learners through adequate staffing. Increased staffing for English language learner students made it possible to support each grade level better and do the "job well."

Ellie remained steadfast in her commitment to a school she helped form years earlier, even though some elements of the program changed. Ellie stayed because despite "district constraints and weird principals," teachers held firm to the vision of the school. Ellie contended staff "buy in" helped teachers identify with schools and survive adversity.

The academic program in Ava's current magnet school coincided with her values of providing all students equal access to an "excellent educational program." Ava stated, "I have to believe in the program" and she considered the program a "good way to teach kids." A shift in school programming in Ava's previous school that she did not support contributed to her migration to her current school.

Concurrent shifts in Lucy's perspective and grade configurations at her school made the school a place in which she wanted to work. Although Lucy had at one time supported K-8 schools, she no longer "believes in K-8 anymore after being here." Lucy looked forward to next year because her school would become a Pre-K-5 school and speculated delaying her retirement for a year.

Barb had faith that the implementation of a co-teaching model positioned her school to do great things. The potential of the school's current program attracted Barb to want to play a role in the anticipated success. The purpose and vision of an administrator motivated Grace to continue to teach despite aggravations. Jade reflected on things she enjoyed about her favorite high-need private school. She stated, "It had a mission that it adhered to and…everyone fully believed in it."

Improvements made in schools over time fortified the alliance of three participants. Lucy stuck with her school for eight years despite family and friends encouraging her to leave. After three years Lucy described as "brutal," the school began to improve and she no longer considered leaving.

Sofia expressed pride in the progress all students made at her multi-lingual, multi-cultural school. The success of English language learners validated the teaching approach used in the school. Sofia wanted to stay "because [the school is] doing a good thing."

After working in the school for eight years Julia remarked, "It is so much calmer. Even on the worst days, when things seem loud and crazy here, it is so much calmer." Julia reflected on the past and improvements in the school to maintain her perspective on difficult days. Countering complaints from team-mates about a hectic day, Julia said, "It was like three kids who were running around. They were loud but it was three!"

Teachers increased their awareness of cultural and socioeconomic differences over time in high poverty schools. Familiarity with culture and socioeconomic backgrounds of their students helped teachers develop confidence in their ability to provide classrooms to meet these needs. Teaching in diverse, high poverty schools initially placed some teachers in a new, unfamiliar milieu. Doris, Lucy, and Mia lacked personal experiences with poverty or diverse

cultures before working in an urban school district. Lucy developed a greater awareness of cultural differences but still wrestled at times with how to address culturally sensitive issues. Doris found the lives of her diverse students in stark contrast to her "sheltered life" growing up in the suburbs. The different "lifestyles or home lives" of her students appealed to Doris, making work interesting. For years, Mia strove to appreciate cultural differences and understand the daily struggles of poverty. She developed an understanding and respect for the different values and struggles of students in her school. A desire to work with diverse, economically challenged students motivated Mia to stay.

Nine of 15 participants addressed developing an understanding of the needs of children living in poverty while working in high-need schools. Ava gained insight into the lives of her students living in poverty from her work in a family shelter. She realized many of her students lacked the advantages she benefited from as a child. This inspired her to focus on honing her skills to teach in high poverty schools. A shift in socioeconomic demographics required Ava to help some teachers develop "skill sets" to work with children in poverty. Some teachers lacked an understanding of how a student's life in poverty affected his or her behavior and performance at school. Potential to increase the capacity of teachers in her school to teach students living in poverty inspired Ava. Ava argued her focus on improving the competence of a number of classroom teachers helped more students than she could as a classroom teacher.

Julia discovered the physical and safety concerns of high poverty students often took precedence in her school. The need of students to feel safe and nourished before they could focus on learning complicated her role. Consequently, her work as a teacher included acting as social worker, psychologist, counselor, parent, and teacher. Ellie identified the need to make "20 decisions a second" for many young students in her multiple roles as mom, nurse, counselor, and

teacher. Ellie explained her work as a teacher allowed her to teach children she "never had to bear" and "give [emphasis] everything that I have, every single day" to improve their lives. Teaching in a high poverty school fulfilled her desire to "be a mom, to be a nurse, to be a consoler, to be a teacher."

A better understanding of the reality of her students helped Lucy become more empathetic and less judgmental. Knowing students living in poverty lacked resources and opportunities, Lucy learned to anticipate background experiences needed for instruction. Lucy developed greater awareness of her students' need for "recognition" and "kindness."

The high rate of poverty in Dave's school remained constant despite an improved economy. This "constant state of recession" and "generational poverty" directly affected his students. Dave understood his five year old students lived with constant uncertainty and stress "moving from place to place" not knowing with whom they would live, or what they would eat. He learned to provide a secure, predictable classroom environment and develop background experiences students lacked.

Doris knew her students often had limited exposure to books, fewer things explained to them, and less access to enriching activities. Ivy learned children in poverty viewed breaks from school with trepidation about "where [they're] staying, or how much [they will have] to eat." Knowing this, Ivy devoted time to talk to students about when they would return to school. Uncertainty about the end of the year began to build for students as early as April. Ivy realized high poverty students experienced a great deal of stress and uncertainty about this time and attempted to provide reassurance and encouragement to students about whatever their summer would entail.

Barb recognized her students faced distractions and obstacles in their personal lives, making it difficult to focus on learning. She stated,

> They have other things going on in their life that sometimes make it difficult to have their learning be top priority but…if you're able to get those kids to a place that they…can focus on their academics and not worry about what else is going on, they are truly…smart individuals.

The belief Barb held about the potential of her students guided her work in the school.

Some participants found working with culturally diverse student populations opened up new learning and experiences. Sofia took pleasure in working in a multi-linguistic, multi-cultural school that reflected a microcosm of the world. Sofia's interest in different cultures led to an "enhanced knowledge" needed to understand and work with various cultural groups.

Ruby's desire to learn about new cultures, bring people together, and support immigrant students made her work appealing. Learning about "where [students] come from…their struggles" and their "funds of knowledge about things I've no idea about" drove Ruby's commitment to her school. Ruby used her knowledge about language and culture to increase understanding between people. She stated, "In some ways as an ESL teacher you're the bridge between one community and another community or… between English and Spanish or… between family and school or monolingual and bilingual." Ruby used a "bridge" metaphor to describe much of her work in this school.

Barb realized after teacher training experiences in two divergent settings that she wanted to work in a school consisting of diverse staff and students. She found the more diverse school focused on meeting a wider range of student academic needs that aligned with her educational philosophy. The urban, diverse school felt like a better fit for Barb.

The pragmatic outlook of participants influenced commitment and retention in high-need schools. A number of participants acknowledged everyone faced challenges in their careers refraining from the "grass is greener" perspective. District meetings with English language learner teachers provided opportunities for Ruby to hear about obstacles teachers faced in other schools. Ruby discovered teachers in every school faced work issues they had to resolve. Ava stated, "You have pockets of issues everywhere. You just have to decide what you want to deal with."

The practical viewpoint surfaced as two participants compared work in other more affluent schools to challenges found in their school. Ava considered working in a low poverty school "a little bit easier" but "there's always a trade-off." She predicted dealing with "parents calling you complaining about …pushing their kid" in low poverty schools. Jade concurred with Ava "that problems would just shift" to dealing with "helicopter parents…questioning what we do" in other low poverty schools. Participants carefully weighed work issues to determine where they wanted to devote time and energy in school.

Grace compared her job to other careers as she processed the problems occurring during especially difficult days in the classroom. She concluded everyone experienced difficult days at work. This outlook that the grass is not greener helped Grace weather difficulties and maintain a perspective about teaching.

Sofia found thoughts about other career options occurring during frustrating times at work always led back to teaching. She figured, "There would always be something in the system that was frustrating, and people are people no matter where you go." Sofia learned from "frustrating experiences in [another] field" she could get through setbacks and persevere.

Two participants described how resilience and perseverance drove their recovery after difficult days. During difficult days, Doris kept in mind the perseverance of her special needs students with academic work. She reminded herself that they looked to her to keep teaching. Doris took solace knowing the difficult day would end, providing an opportunity to start fresh the next day.

Tom engaged in self-reflection following tough days. He explained, he wanted to start over to "get that bad taste" out of his mouth. He maintained a hopeful outlook and did not get overly upset about work issues. This new mindset, adopted a few years ago when Tom re-entered teaching, helped him persist during rough times.

Teachers described evolving from having idealistic standards to setting realistic goals for themselves thus reducing pressure and anxiety. Five of 15 participants spoke of abandoning idealistic standards in favor of more realistic expectations. While Lucy admired passionate young teachers "ready to change the world," she learned over time to moderate and focus her expectations. Lucy expected to impact "just a little bit of [the world]" and felt content striving to do her best at New Rockford School (pseudonym).

Ellie revealed a self-imposed expectation to successfully teach every student despite advice from her father who taught for many years. Faced with many obstacles, Ellie told herself to "get as many as I can…I'm not always going to get 'em *[sic]* all." Ellie maintained her "inner drive" to teach all students while accepting the reality she may not succeed with every student because of the "many forces working against that."

Julia mirrored Ellie's perspective saying, "You can't reach them all." Although sad about this idea, she accepted it as a reality. She described teachers "in the parking lot crying over the one kid," losing sight of the many other students in their classroom. Julia preferred to

focus on the students who made progress rather than dwell on expectations she considered unattainable. Jade also stated she became more realistic over time recognizing she may not reach all students.

Eight of 15 participants voiced a perspective about teachers in conflict with popular notions of inner-city teachers. These stereotyped images of urban teachers potentially promote unrealistic standards and distort the work of teachers. Teaching in a high poverty school debunked Barb's romantic notion that teachers reached students through a powerful moment in the classrooms. Barb learned effective classrooms did not result from a dramatic moment with a charismatic teacher. She realized teaching boiled down to high-quality instruction from a teacher holding high expectations for students. Barb discovered the impact of teachers relied less on personality and more on skill.

Tom, Lucy, Grace, and Jade viewed their teaching in matter-of-fact terms, counter to stereotyped images of teachers impassioned about their work. Both Lucy and Tom began teaching in their schools because they needed jobs; however, they strive to do a good job and enjoy their work. Grace stated, "I'm really good at this job okay, so I found the right career for myself and for that I'm glad." Jade felt good about viewing teaching as "just" a job. In spite of this admission, she felt an expectation to feel guilty about this perspective. These teachers viewed teaching in their school as a job they did well and enjoyed.

Restricting their focus to teaching in spite of the pervasive needs in high poverty schools provided clarity of roles for teachers. Ellie learned she could not alleviate students of the harsh realities of poverty, but through teaching, she could empower them to change their lives. Ellie, Ava, and Doris curbed their roles to focus on teaching students so they get a good education.

Participants' history of service in high-need schools revealed a close connection formed with schools when teachers believed the academic programming aligned with their values and made a difference for students. Participants valued learning about different cultures and developed greater cultural and socio-economic awareness to meet student needs. Participants maintained their perspective when faced with disappointments and struggles through a realistic outlook. Teachers in high poverty schools needed rewarding and pleasant circumstances encouraging retention to overshadow adversity in their work.

Summary

Three elements led to satisfaction and enjoyment for participants working in high-need schools: student, parent and colleague relationships; professionalism; and values and a history of service in these high poverty schools. Participants experiencing these elements expressed a sense of confidence, accomplishment, and satisfaction. In chapter five, I describe the aspects of teachers' work in high-need schools decreasing their commitment to their work. Some adverse factors concerned their work inside the school, while other factors in the school system and community caused them to question their choice of school and profession.

CHAPTER FIVE

FACTORS UNDERMINING TEACHERS'COMMITMENT TO THEIR WORK

In this chapter, I identify aspects of work undermining teacher commitment to their work in high poverty schools and also describe the coping strategies adopted by teachers to sustain their engagement and satisfaction in their work. Three factors detracted from teacher job satisfaction and commitment to their work with students and families in high-need schools: (1) student behavior, (2) mobility of students, faculty, and principals, and (3) the excessive (and unrealistic) expectations and demands of internal and external stakeholders. The first two factors, student behavior and mobility, negatively affected teacher perceptions of their role and work inside the classroom. The first factor, managing student behavior, drained teachers' physical and emotional energy, consumed instructional time, and required considerable effort and expertise to maintain an orderly learning environment. More than any other factor, student behavior rose to the top of the list of detractions.

Student Behavior

Thirteen of 15 teachers placed managing student behavior at the top of the list. Lucy's previous life experiences as a mother, parent volunteer, and private school teacher left her ill-prepared for the unsafe and disturbing behavior she faced in her classroom when she began teaching in her current school eight years ago. She explained, "My eyes were like deer in the headlight," and wondered in disbelief, "Is this for real?" Lucy characterized the first four years at her school as "behavior management," spending 45 minutes of a 55-minute "specialist" period dealing with student behavior. During this time, fights routinely erupted, resulting in "mad chaos." Other students in the class cheered as students fought or ran from the room, shouting, "There's a fight in [name omitted] room! There's a fight!"

Although fights still occur, Lucy noted the other students remain calm and do not egg on those fighting. During her initial years at her school, students routinely talked back to her using the "B" word for b***h, shouted "I hate you!" and worse. Students ran around in the halls and hid in the bathrooms, making the school environment feel chaotic and unsafe. Lucy resorted to "rewarding [students] for basically breathing" with stickers and treats for the first seven years of her teaching career. Giving rewards to students allowed Lucy to teach - otherwise student behavior made it nearly impossible to fulfill her duties.

Despite her undergraduate degree in urban sociology and prior experience in high poverty organizations, problem student behaviors stymied Jade. Jade found herself forced to face challenging behavior not tolerated in private schools, and developed a greater understanding of student needs. Jade provided a contrast of different organizational responses to student behavior.

> [In] private schools you try really hard and you try hard and you try really hard, but if it's not working, then the student is expelled…. [In the after school program] you try really hard, you try really hard, [and] you try really hard, but, if it's not working, then you just say you can't come back. Here, you try hard, you try hard, you try hard and then it's still not working but there's … nothing you can do about it usually.

Expulsion of students from her public school due to an extreme incident rarely occurred, and most students with persistent behavior problems remained.

Unlike in Jade's previous experience, where student behavior rarely affected her teaching rendering it indiscernible, her new position allowed her "no out." Jade now faced challenging student behavior with no potential for relief, except her ability to change her practice and try to manage student behavior. Both Lucy and Jade commented on safety concerns. Jade generally felt safe with students she knew but sensed hostility from other students that made her anxious. Other teachers in Jade's school expressed a greater concern for safety.

The frequency and severity of problem behavior in her school stood out for Kim despite 22 years teaching in urban schools and her childhood experience in a city school with similar demographics. Kim heard stories of unruly students before she began working at the school. The school had a reputation for an out of control school climate with students kicking and fighting teachers, fighting with each other, and running around the building. Behavior management skills Kim developed over years teaching in two other urban schools proved ineffective. Kim's students in her first grade classroom refused to follow classroom rules or teacher directions. Establishing order in her classroom required her to review classroom rules daily, redirect students frequently, and repeat directions multiple times. Kim had not had students who were suspended from her classrooms in her previous schools; however, students in her current school engaged in behavior severe enough to warrant suspension.

Grace's perspective of work in high-need schools resulted from teaching over 17 years in several different schools in the district. Having taught for 13 years in high-need schools on the Westside (pseudonym used for an impoverished area of the city), Grace noted less severe student behavior at her current high poverty school in another area of the city. She termed the Westside the "hardest of the hard," claiming teachers in these schools faced a level of student misbehavior other teachers could not imagine. Despite the extreme challenges posed by unsafe student behavior, Grace believed teachers benefited from experience in Westside schools because "if you can handle yourself teaching there, you can handle just about anywhere." Grace credited teaching on the Westside for helping her acquire skills to deal with severe student behavior and manage classroom behavior.

Mia took inappropriate student behavior in stride after many years teaching at the same school. Stories about third graders trashing the bathroom or saying, "F-you, [name omitted],"

shocked Mia's friends who did not teach. Mia accepted disrespectful student behavior and profanity resulting from student frustration as a reality of teaching.

Ellie identified having less tolerance for students who deliberately do things they know they should not do. During her first year teaching in a high poverty school, Ellie excused inappropriate behavior because she felt bad for students living in "really tough situations" with some families involved in drugs and prostitution. Mentoring from a volunteer helped Ellie alter her belief in her students' capacity to meet high standards and increase expectations. Ellie changed her practice, raised expectations, and gained a reputation as a "strong disciplinarian" over time.

Ellie considered the first two weeks of this year with students "chaotic," when ten students with significant behavior problems in grade one ended up in her classroom. The number of challenging students made for the toughest beginning of a school year Ellie remembered in 20 years. Even as Ellie made headway establishing classroom routines with most students, Max (pseudonym) refused to complete the daily classroom assignment. Student refusals to participate do not disrupt other students' learning but do impact the learning of the student who does not participate. After weeks of refusing, Max recently showed Ellie he completed the work.

Some teachers encountered disruptive behavior for a time when students adjusted to the school environment. Four of the high-need schools worked with many students who spoke English as their second language and students new to the United States. Ellie told about a student in a previous class born in a refugee camp who attended school for the first time in second grade. The combination of poor nutrition, years in a refugee camp, and lack of education

provided overwhelming challenges for this student. The student struggled to adjust to his new world spending the first month in Ellie's class screaming and crying.

Lucy identified inappropriate student behavior linked to a lack of background experience about proper conduct in the classroom. Students in her class did not know how to use school materials "without destroying them," so Lucy walked them through each step of collecting the materials, using the materials, and returning materials. Lucy illustrated her point with an example of students using resources provided by the school district. Setting out supplies for an instructional activity, she noticed some students taking a handful and putting some into their pockets. She verbally reminded students of the written directions to "Take two." Students wrote the direction in a notebook and Lucy followed up asking them to tell her the materials needed. Even after multiple, explicit directions some students took a handful of items. When this happened, she resorted to directly handing out the objects to each student taking a great deal of time away from the activity. Because students lacked knowledge about behavior expectations in school regarding treatment of materials, other students, and teachers, Lucy modeled each step beginning with how students entered the classroom.

Managing student behavior involved not only teaching students basic expectations but also holding them accountable when they did not meet the expectations. Special education students in Doris' classroom remained with her multiple years; consequently, most students knew her behavior expectations. She stated, "I run a tight ship…[and] I don't play." Doris expected students at times would challenge the rules and directions. She remained unwavering in her expectations and prepared to deal with student misbehavior.

Maintaining classroom expectations with the same students over multiple years involved dealing with behavior Doris called "silly stuff," such as storming out of the classroom when

asked to sound out a word or falling to the ground when told to write their name. These behaviors did not pose a danger to other students but created disruptions in teaching and learning. The frequency of disruptions in Doris' classroom set it apart from other schools.

Doris contrasted student behavior in her school and her daughter's school in the suburbs as an example. Helping with an art project in her daughter's classroom, Doris noticed students worked with the materials given to them. Doris imagined students at her school in a similar situation would fall to the ground if they did not like the color of the skittle or if their skittle rolled off their desk. Doris described an incident during the same week when her classroom joined a general education second grade classroom to work on a pumpkin activity. A student from the second grade general education classroom engaged in a temper tantrum while working on this project because he could not use the glitter glue immediately. This illustrated a contrast between two schools with classrooms of students engaged in activities requiring little academic effort with strikingly different student behavior. Doris provided the following list of student behaviors to describe what her school looked like. She said, "There's crying sometimes, there's screaming sometimes, there's swearing sometimes, there's running sometimes, there's kicking."

Tom identified similar behaviors occurring in his school. Student behaviors included yelling, crying, screaming, and running. Some of these behaviors occurred between unsupervised students in the hallways at times with staff "spread thin." Tom also remarked on the disrespectful manner in which students spoke to each other during this time. Student behavior at times escalated and turned an ordinary day into a stressful one with Tom shifting from one crisis to another. Tom described how an ordinary day in his classroom could spiral out of control. Difficulties began with a power struggle between Tom and a student who refused to participate while the entire classroom of students watched. Tom reminded himself, "Okay, he's

driving me nuts, but he's also ten" and disengaged from the struggle. The following lesson failed because students would not pay attention to Tom's instruction. "Then you turn your back and two kids are fighting and you go in the hall and you have two other kids fighting." Some days Tom noted a behavior incident erupted every half hour throughout the day with students lashing out because of a comment or accidental bump from a fellow student. Tom felt dazed on these days and eager for them to end.

Ivy described the previous school year when one difficult day followed another stretching into weeks and months persisting the entire year. Terms Ivy used to talk about last year called to mind surviving a natural disaster. She referred to a "perfect storm" occurring with student mental health issues, significant academic needs, and academic expectations of the district's pacing schedule. Ivy struggled with "not getting anywhere and going backwards" due to the mental health and academic needs that "bubbled up" in her classroom. Ivy doubted she would have left her school because of one extremely difficult year, but still credited other staff for her "survival" and "coming up under" her and the students.

Developing skills in managing student behavior in a classroom surfaced in five interviews. Julia knew after her second year at Elk Ridge Elementary (pseudonym) that she needed to improve her classroom management to become an effective teacher. She concentrated on developing strategies for dealing with student behavior. Julia identified a "sink or swim mentality" realizing she either needed to "figure out how to manage a class or I can't do it." Developing competency in managing her classroom allowed Julia to devote attention to academic instruction.

Ava acquired strategies to use for handling behavior inside her classroom before engaging other building support. When Ava worked as a classroom teacher, she exhausted every

strategy to deal with student behavior before resorting to the school's behavior team. Ava only called on outside support when absolutely necessary because she wanted to maintain control over handling the situation. She felt it important to hold her students accountable for their behavior and believed this resulted in a stronger sense of community.

Establishing a strong connection with students came through as Mia described a prior student with behavior needs significant enough to result in the student's identification as a special education student. Mia believed she made inroads with this student evident in a dramatic improvement in attendance. She continued to mentor this student daily even when he advanced to the next grade level. Honing skills in handling behavior problems increased Mia's interest in students with behavior and emotional needs. Mia's reputation in her school for dealing with behavior problems prompted second grade teachers to place students needing support in her third grade classroom.

Often teachers known for managing challenging behavior ended up with classrooms stacked with troubled students or received students during the year who struggled in another classroom. Grace's skill in managing classroom behavior resulted in many administrators over the course of her career relocating students into her class from other classrooms. Grace succeeded in working with students who other teachers could not reach. Every year administrators reassigned a student whose behavior challenged another teacher into Grace's room. Grace expected the administrator would come to her again this year.

The significant role managing behavior played in Grace's schools often overshadowed attention given to instructional effectiveness. Grace asserted no one knew what she did in her classroom but deemed her a competent teacher because she did not require help with behavior.

Dealing with behavior in classrooms consumed so much time from administrators they failed to notice what Grace taught.

Dave had a particularly difficult time with a kindergarten student later diagnosed with a Developmental Cognitive Disability (DCD). Ensuring a student acquired behavior needed to access the learning environment took precedence for Dave. The student's extremely disruptive and unsafe behavior became a priority for Dave over significant academic needs. Dave had to figure out how to communicate with the student who functioned like a "one and a half year old." When initially enrolled, the student entered the resource rich kindergarten classroom and "within minutes" tore apart and scattered all the shelves filled with math cubes, boxes of shapes, and books. Dave and other school staff worked for almost six weeks to teach the student how to function in a school setting. As a result of their intense six-week effort, the student worked for short periods of time at a table with puzzles and manipulatives, sat with other students to listen to a story, and followed school routines.

Some of the behavior problems occurring in these schools resulted from students with mental health issues. Five of 15 participants talked about mental health issues impacting students in their schools. Ruby noted an increase in the number of mental health issues in students as young as Pre-Kindergarten. Doris believed the number of students struggling with mental health issues distinguished her school from others and resulted in a wait list for the mental health - counseling group. Doris expressed frustration when referred students did not receive help because parents did not "take advantage" of a "free service" offered "during the school day."

Grace's experience handling extreme student behavior had not prepared her for the "unbelievable" depression experienced by students over the last three years in her current school.

She believed the depression in her students occurred as an outcome of their harsh childhood living in poverty.

Lucy expressed uncertainty in dealing with mental health issues due to a lack of skills or training to meet the "psychological needs of these kids." In Lucy's classrooms, mental health issues and social problems occurred in 18 of 20 students. Lucy felt the critical mass of students experiencing problem behaviors prevented positive modeling in her classes. A majority of students with behavior problems fueled a contagion effect of negative behavior. Solutions to preventing mental health issues from impacting the classroom eluded Lucy.

Dave concurred with participants who believed mental health issues had increased over time. Although he could not quantify the change, he based this claim on what he observed in his classroom. Dave drew a distinction between a typical high-needs class with one minor behavior problem and many academic needs and last year's "extremely high-needs class." Last year's class consisted of many students struggling with social-emotional issues "beyond what a normal teacher should be dealing with." In the "extremely high-needs class," a student would throw a chair in response to frustration, hit other students in anger, run out of the room, or shut down and stop communicating.

The severity of some students' mental health issues placed them at risk in a classroom with limited adult supervision. Dave described one situation: a student placed in his kindergarten class would run out of the classroom, building, and around the school grounds in reaction to any transition. Because Dave could not leave his other students unattended, he found another staff member to return the student to class. The behavior of this student created a precarious situation for Dave who needed to ensure the safety of all students in his care.

Dave struggled with the dilemma posed when the severity and frequency of students in crisis due to mental illness impacted other students' instruction. Dave told about one of his five year old students standing outside his classroom yelling, "I'm (g)onna *[sic]* kill you! I'm (g)onna *[sic]* do this, I'm (g)onna *[sic]* do this…!" during a visit of teachers from another school district. The behavior team tried unsuccessfully to subdue the student until it became clear Dave needed to intervene. Dave left the classroom to calm his student, leaving the assistant educator to provide classroom instruction. Dave wanted to devote time and attention to teaching students but needed to deescalate a highly charged situation with a student in distress.

Dealing with student behavior problems and mental health issues created stress draining teachers' physical and emotional energy. Dave connected the stress of dealing with significant behavior and mental issues to teacher attrition, illness, and problems at home. Over time, Dave saw teachers succumbing to work related stress and leaving the school. Both Dave and Grace talked about hyper-vigilant behaviors in high-need schools. Dave explained staying vigilant for "six hours …because the safety of these children are your number one priority…you turn your back for a second…anything can happen."

Encountering behavior problems in students became customary for Grace in her previous schools. For the first six months at her current school, Grace said, "I was waiting for something to happen and nothing happened…there's gotta *[sic]* be a fight that breaks out…it was almost like tension, I couldn't relax." Grace felt distressed with the calm in her classroom because she had become so accustomed to dealing with crises.

Participants described severe and frequent student behaviors inappropriate for classrooms in their schools. Teachers developed management skills to handle student behaviors, but felt particularly challenged with students' mental health issues. Student behavior interfered with

instruction, consumed attention, and produced stress for teachers. Confronted with pressure to make academic gains in the classroom in spite of student disruptions put a great strain on teachers. Teachers also faced instability in their environment as staff and students migrated through high-need schools.

Mobility

Staff mobility

The second factor negatively affecting teacher commitment includes mobility of staff and students. Teacher mobility occurred involuntarily through dismissals, budget cuts, staff realignment, school closings, or reconstitution; or voluntarily when teachers chose to leave a school. A revolving door of principals contributed to instability for teachers in high-need schools. This staff mobility adversely affected teacher morale, expertise, and school culture. Student movement required teachers to adapt continually to an ever-changing environment.

Involuntary teacher mobility adversely affected teachers due to a loss of control in their careers. Ten of 15 participants felt satisfied with their school, but circumstances forced them to seek positions in other schools. Kim valued stability and had no desire to change schools saying, "I'm not one to move from school to school." When her school closed, Kim had no choice but to move to another school. She came to enjoy that school and had no plans to leave; however, in spite of Kim's commitment to this school, this school also closed forcing Kim to move once again to her current school.

The closing of a private urban school serving low-income students led Jade to teach in her current school as a math interventionist. Jade appreciated working at a small private school. She said it was "a fabulous experience, I loved it with all my heart," and she had no desire to leave. Jade claimed she "would have stayed there forever, but they closed."

Barb had not planned to transfer to another school but found she had no choice. The reconstitution of her previous school involved removing and rehiring all administrators and staff. Barb along with a number of her colleagues accepted positions at another high poverty school in the same area of the city.

Lucy valued job security and wanted to make teaching her career. Lucy's layoff from her school after seven years threatened her career ambitions. She settled for a part time position in her current school because "it was the only position…available at that time." This position grew into a full time position and Lucy continued to work in the school for eight years. Although Dave had fewer years teaching experience, he also ended up in his current school after a teacher layoff. Ruby moved to her current school because her previous school reduced her full time position to a half time position.

Circumstances beyond Doris' control blocked her lifelong desire to teach in elementary education. Doris pursued a teaching position in another school after her school excessed the position she held her first year of teaching. The teaching position Doris accepted in a private school ended in disappointment when the school closed. These unwanted disruptions led Doris to seek a special education license culminating in constant employment as a special education teacher.

With the exception of her last move, Sofia characterized her moves to nine schools over fourteen years the result of budget cuts. Because she had no control over the school to which she moved or grade levels she taught, Sofia taught English language learner students in "every grade" from Kindergarten to high school over the past fourteen years. Sofia decided after many years to take the initiative to secure a teaching position in the school of her choice.

Adverse consequences occurred when a lack of control over careers forced teachers into high poverty schools. Four of 15 participants identified the need for teachers to want to teach in high-need schools. Mia believed working in high-need schools required a strong desire to withstand the hard work demanded of the job. Without a strong motivation to work in these schools, teachers became exhausted and left. She attributed turnover in her school from teachers not dedicated to working with high poverty students.

Ava expressed concern for high poverty schools with high turnover and many open teaching positions to fill. Schools with many open teaching positions end up with teachers placed in positions unfilled when school begins. Ava considered teachers placed in positions they did not apply for or want "the worst kind of teachers to get."

Jade's previous private sector experience led her to identify a need for teachers who "want to work in high poverty schools." She took for granted the commitment of staff in her private school at the time. The teachers Jade noted "were all there because they really wanted to be there and enjoyed it."

Regardless of the challenges created through high turnover, Tom echoed the need for teachers who want to teach in high-need schools. Tom underscored the harmful effect on teachers of unmotivated, discontented staff who did not want to work in the school. When teachers who did not want to work at his school left "the air just [seemed] lighter."

The loss of control teachers experienced over their careers resulted in feelings of despair and uncertainty. Ivy identified feeling "jaded" after enduring situations in which she felt powerless. One of the circumstances involved an involuntary placement into a position she did not want, leading Ivy to drop a specialized teaching license. When Ivy's previous school closed, she had lost hope in having any control over her school assignment.

The effect of school closings on Grace's morale emerged from her description of 17 years teaching.

> I started at [name of school] back in the day....then I went to [name of school] and then I went to [name of school] [because] they kept closing down. So every time they closed down, I would just move…. and I was going to quit teaching altogether but I loved the principal that I worked for so then I came over here.

The multiple moves due to school closings nearly resulted in Grace leaving the teaching profession altogether.

Early in her career, Julia faced the end of each school year, and wondered if she was going to have a job. After six years of teaching, she lost her position at her school due to staff layoffs. Although the district offered her a teaching position at another school, Julia felt unprepared to take the position offered when the school district recalled her in late August. She considered her options to accept a last minute teaching job or take a leave of absence. The threat of losing her teaching position and last minute offer left Julia feeling "disgruntled with the politics of working in … [the] district." Taking the leave of absence offered "a mental health break" Julia needed.

High teacher turnover created disruptions in collegial relationships that in turn adversely affected school climate. Ellie shared the aftermath of sweeping district budget cuts in which her school lost at least a dozen teachers in one year. The staff developed a very strong bond from working closely with each other for years. Ellie explained this loss as taking apart the "fabric of our school" leaving teachers who remained at the school devastated.

Due to chronic turnover throughout the years, Ivy recalled only five teachers, a couple of engineers, and staff in a special education program remained from her first year in the school. Ivy felt fortunate that the unity on her grade level team offset the lack of community throughout

the school. Feeling unified with other staff provided Ivy "a lot of juice." Ivy needed time to get to know other members, develop trust, and figure out how to collaborate.

High teacher mobility due to changes in assignments or team members reduced teachers' expertise and collective efficacy. Teachers who moved from one grade to the next had to become familiar with grade level content, curriculum, and standards. Involuntary moves to four different schools over 17 years required Grace to "jump around grades." In one school, Grace taught first grade and fourth grade. She changed schools and taught second grade, third, and fifth grade. After remaining in the same grade level for a number of years, Grace felt confident in her knowledge of the curriculum. She stated, "I'm better with the curriculum…it takes a long time to get to know the curriculum… I'm better with that…. probably a lot better with that."

Doris articulated the challenge caused by shifting grade levels. She had become comfortable teaching first grade after years until changes in special education programs required her to teach a split classroom including kindergarten students. Doris found it took time to adjust and gain confidence to teach this new grade level effectively.

Ava described "tons of turnover" in her previous high poverty school where after eight years teaching, others considered her a "senior teacher." She watched teachers on her team start to develop into "strong teachers" after two or three years. However, many of these promising teachers lost their jobs – and Ava found herself caught in a frustrating cycle of training "fabulous teachers and then [losing them]." Eventually, Ava and her grade level team of teachers moved to a school with more stable staffing escaping this vicious cycle. Dave regretted no inducement existed to help retain probationary teachers that left his school after achieving tenure. He recalled only two other teachers remained over the eight years he taught at the school.

Working in a school with "staff that's always changing," required endless onboarding of teachers. Tom counted seven new staff this school year. He stated, "Whatever we taught…last year, we have to reteach these guys." Tom indicated teachers typically stay in his school for a couple of years and then leave, requiring a repeat of trainings already provided to existing staff. Constant turnover blocked progress of the school. Tom claimed, "You can't get that machine going when you're taking like little parts out."

Administrative mobility adversely affected teachers' sense of permanence and self-confidence. Seven of 15 participants mentioned challenges involved in principal turnover. Working with a new principal created a tentative situation for Tom. He felt comfortable working with the previous principal after three years, but now Tom took a wait and see attitude. Uncertainty about where he stood with the new administrator restricted confidence gained over twelve years.

Mia remarked on the ripple effect occurring when new principals shifted the school's programming they expected teachers to implement in high-need classrooms. Teachers invested time and effort implementing one principal's vision until the next principal arrived with a different initiative for them to implement. Mia found "rotating" principals, visions, and staff problematical. Grace worked for nine different principals in 12 years. She expressed frustration over "a different principal every year who has a different vision, and has no idea what it is to teach in a classroom."

Ava thought the district did a better job now keeping principals at the same school but described turnover in the past feeling like "a revolving door." Difficulty filling administrative positions Ava believed led to the least skilled principals leading her prior school. Ava concluded no one wanted to lead them so teachers continued to lead themselves.

After eight years in her current school, Barb worked with four or five different assistant principals and two principals. Ivy talked about the uncertainty of not knowing who would replace an outgoing administrator. After a number of assistant principals migrated through the school, Ivy described her unease waiting for the final selection of an administrator.

Ellie worked in the same school for 24 years under the leadership of seven different principals. Some principals brought along teachers from prior schools. Ellie adjusted to new leadership styles, disregard for her substantial input into the school, and favoritism of staff.

Student Mobility

Student mobility created uncertainty for teachers inhibiting preparation and planning for students they would teach. After many years in a high poverty school, Ivy developed a "high tolerance for ambiguity" to cope with not knowing who on her class list would show up in the fall. Ivy did not spend energy setting up her classroom because she knew a student enrolled the previous year could move over the summer. Uncertain about which students on her list would actually show up, she waited to put student names on materials or desks until they arrived.

Mobility of students reduced teachers' efficacy due to interruptions in educational programming. Two teachers spoke of students leaving and then returning after a prolonged period of time, creating a lack of continuity in instruction. In Ivy's experience, student mobility could involve students leaving the school only to return a year or two later. When students returned after a prolonged time, a gap occurred in educational continuity. Teachers would not know what educational programming occurred during students' absence. Mia described interruptions in instruction at her school after winter break when "[their] little group of Latino kids" left and returned in May.

Mia thought the academic program started five years ago at her school would start to show results for students. She worried the "transient" student population would make it difficult to gauge the school's impact. Mia explained that many students in her classroom who attended the school since first grade "disappear" in fourth grade.

Ruby assisted in placing in-coming students into classrooms as part of her lead teacher role. This provided first-hand knowledge about the magnitude of student mobility in her school. Ruby explained, "It's a high poverty school and so families end up moving," and "kids come and go." The high student turnover resulted in "a flurry of parents coming" into the office to enroll their child in the school. Teachers faced a constant influx of students to integrate into their classroom throughout the school year.

One of Julia's satisfactions of teaching came from reconnecting and maintaining relationships with former students. Unfortunately, due to high student mobility, only one or two of her former first grade students remained at her school after eight years.

Large scale student mobility diminished teachers' knowledge about their students. For many years, Ellie's community school experienced shifts in ethnic groups representing the diverse student population. The most dramatic shift occurred in the socio-economic level of students attending Ellie's school. At one time, the community consisted of primarily middle class families and now Ellie noted many students in the school live in poverty.

Changes in socio-economic demographics at Ava's school placed teachers who worked in the school a long time at a disadvantage. They lacked experience required to develop expertise working with high-need students living in poverty. Ava worked to help these teachers increase awareness and skills to teach students living in poverty.

Mobility of teachers and principals occurring involuntarily affected teacher morale, expertise, and school culture. Teachers endured uncertainty, insecurity, and anxiety losing control over their careers. Shifting assignments and schools threatened teachers' sense of expertise in teaching. Frequent turnover in teachers and principals resulted in disruptions in staffing affecting the culture and progress of the school. Student mobility affected teachers' capability to prepare for students, determine the outcome of their work, and maintain relationships with students. Large scale demographic shifts in student populations diminished teachers' effectiveness until new learning occurred. Sources contributing to the lack of control and stress teachers felt extended past the school walls to pressures from stakeholders.

Pressure Cooker: Teacher Stress and Burnout

Pressure mounted for teachers from sources inside and outside the school system. Internal and external stakeholders pushed for greater accountability and control of schools ignoring teacher expertise, creating stress, and damaging morale. Reform efforts with short life-spans stunted outcomes for teachers and students. To maintain commitment, teachers found ways to deal with the stresses of their work.

Internal Expectations and Demands

Expectations and demands from internal and external stakeholders put stress on teachers in high-need schools. Ten of 15 participants spoke of having no control over changes in organizational structures, changing initiatives, and expectations impacting their work. Shifting expectations and public criticism resulted in concern and frustration for a number of teachers.

Changes in school structures imposed from the school district disrupted the existing school climate for teachers. Ellie and other staff members at her school worked unsuccessfully to persuade the school district not to change their multi-age classrooms to single grade levels.

The teachers developed curriculum for use in multi-age classrooms at the inception of the school. Teachers viewed the existing multi-age configurations integral to their school's identity. Ellie claimed the staff felt "devastated" at having the district chip away at their magnet program.

Ava experienced a drastic change in school climate when the district merged her school with another. She described close interpersonal relationships among staff and high quality meetings in her school before the merger. Combining the two schools caused the staff size to swell and become impersonal. Professional development became virtually impossible because of the number of teachers. Ava transferred to another school to recapture the close knit feeling she lost.

A number of participants identified adverse consequences in school climate when the school district housed separate schools in the same building. Conflict occurred when the school district placed another school in the building Ellie's staff considered "our school." Ellie helped establish the original school working ten to twelve hours a day to develop systems, policies, and curriculum. Ellie rejected the idea of another school moving in on her turf. For the first year, tension and in-fighting occurred between staff producing a contentious environment.

Ivy struggled with obstacles occurring when her school shared a building with another. Each school operated with different rules for students, separate professional development, disparate expectations for teachers, and separate administration. Teachers felt disconnected from the other staff they saw on a regular basis. Sharing space presented logistical challenges for teachers to overcome in accomplishing daily routines. Two schools in one building adversely affected interpersonal relationships and practices important to school climate.

Julia talked about the obstacles teachers encountered from the overcrowding occurring when two schools shared one building. Housing two separate schools in one building resulted in

a large student population putting a strain on teachers. The school felt "chaotic," "loud," and "crazy." Julia described special education teachers holding class in the hallways and lunch lines stretching the length of the school.

School and district reforms affected teachers due to frequent changes in teaching practices inhibiting efficacy. The short life-span of school or district initiatives did not allow teachers enough time to see the benefits of their efforts. Lucy explained the district engaged in "a lot of initiatives" from year to year and "people come up with these brilliant ideas and we all say, 'Sure, let's try it' and then it's dropped." Disenchanted with reform efforts in her school and the district Lucy considered the shifting initiatives as "wasted time."

Tom explained when results did not occur after two years, "They wanna *[sic]* bring something else in" even though it "takes like three to five" years for staff to effectively implement a strategy and show results. Ellie expressed skepticism about change efforts occurring "every year" because of dissatisfaction with the reform effort initiated the prior year. She wanted to invest her energy in instructional methods or programs that work for her students with staying power not the latest fleeting educational fad.

Ivy found it difficult to keep all of the school and district reform efforts straight. After naming a number of initiatives, she confessed to not knowing how they fit together or when they occurred but "it just felt like there was a lot of things." Her fatigue surfaced during an extremely frustrating year when a reform effort extended the school day. Ivy admitted wanting to scrap the initiative one month into the school year.

Recent district systems developed to measure teacher effectiveness and manage classroom instruction undermined professionalism. Lucy found the new district teacher evaluation consumed time, created stress, and crushed her morale. Lucy considered the district's

teacher observation "a big waste of [administrators'] time and my time" only put in place to root out teachers not doing their job. Lucy selected a challenging class for her observation so the principal could "see what it was like" and understand the realities she faced in her classroom. Following this observation, Lucy described feeling "depressed for a week." and "thought I'll never live this down. I'm an experienced teacher….I was… personally demoralized."

The district system aligning curriculum with assessments designed to direct instruction impeded classroom instruction. Lucy understood the rationale of providing continuity for highly mobile students, but noted the required pre-assessment and post-assessment took too much time away from instruction. Dave concurred with Lucy's concern about time spent assessing rather than teaching. Dave believed the cumbersome protocol showed a lack of understanding about the reality of teaching in a high-need school. Relying on "people from the outside who don't have experience" to establish systems discounted the complex nature of teaching in high-need schools. Dave compared having people outside schools guide his practice to his telling an Olympic athlete "how to win the hundred yard dash," or starting a restaurant because he ate in one.

Current emphasis on teacher accountability determined through student test performance restricted professional judgement and damaged efficacy. Priorities established to ensure students read well before their first proficiency test in grade three allocated teaching assistants to the early grades in Tom's school. This left his struggling fifth grade classroom without support needed during instruction. Tom worried he would not make gains on the standardized assessment this year.

The district's singular focus on student test scores disregarded student needs, restricted professional judgment, and raised teacher stress. Dave stated, "When you go to the district and

you say look what's [going] on here, you know their thing is, 'We don't care. Where are the results?'" Dave contended the school district's emphasis pushes high-need schools to respond to data rather than "real needs."

Expectations to increase student proficiency on standardized tests stifled teacher autonomy in Dave's school. The district heightened control and oversight of the entire school rather than focusing on individual teachers obtaining poor results. The district's reaction to his school's test results employed a "panic mode in management." The "top-down" approach felt "oppressive" to Dave. Dave thought teachers grow weary of fighting to exercise professional judgment and leave.

Because of the disproportionate focus on test scores Lucy stated, "Teachers are now overwhelmed with teaching math and reading 'cause scores are so low so they don't have time to teach science." The school hired a specialist to teach science freeing up classroom time to teach math and reading. Kim noted the rigor of the curriculum made it necessary for teachers to focus on "just reading and math" whereas in the past she taught "spelling, handwriting, history, social studies, science…all in one day."

Educational expectations resulted in increased pressure on student achievement at an early age. Ivy perceived the transition to all-day kindergarten increased academic demands resulting in students struggling as early as first grade. The pressure on academic achievement for primary students raised a philosophical dilemma for both Ivy and Julia. Julia expressed a concern over the "disconnect between what kids are developmentally ready for and what we're expecting them to know." Expectations for students occurred because "the standards say we have to do it and the core knowledge says we have to have them ready for it." Working in the primary grades Julia felt torn between her educational philosophy and current academic expectations of the district and state.

Shifting expectations created a moving target Sofia struggled to hit. Working with English language learners, Sofia attempted to develop her students' academic language and meet academic standards. Sofia described difficulty meeting the language standards because the criteria to meet specific standards changed. Consequently, success eluded her when "the bar" constantly climbed.

The expectation to attain high test scores carried significant consequences generating high levels of stress and insecurity for teachers. The constant threat of closing down hung over Dave's school. Fluctuating student achievement scores and turnover maintained the threat creating an environment unappealing to many teachers.

External Expectations and Demands

The harsh, critical views of external stakeholders struck at teachers' professionalism, disparaged their chosen vocation, and deeply offended teachers. A number of participants devised strategies to withstand this public disparagement. Describing her frustration over the poor reputation of her school brought tears to Doris' eyes. Doris defended the quality of teaching, claiming people did not understand the complexity of working in her school and could not do any better.

Julia expressed concern about the impact an increasingly negative perception of teachers had on the classroom. She worried negative messaging at home damaged students' interest in school, desire to learn, and respect for their teacher.

Lucy felt the media blamed teachers for "a lot of problems" while not fully understanding the complexity of the work. In Lucy's eyes, government mandated testing encouraged placing student success solely on the teacher's shoulders. Negative media messaging years ago about his urban school in another city drove Tom out of teaching. After re-entering the profession, Tom

worked to protect himself from the frustration and pressure he felt from the public criticism of schools.

In the last couple of years, Ivy noted more people give her their unsolicited opinion of education. Whenever Ivy heard comments, she felt compelled to correct "uninformed assumptions about students and families" and defend colleagues. She shielded herself from the negative messaging about schools and teachers in magazines, newspapers, and online public forums.

Barb used her daily experiences in her school to offset the negative messages in the newspapers. Work in the classroom reminded her, "We've got great teachers here, we have great kids here, these kids are coming in and learning every single day what they need to learn." Belief that her school's accomplishments involved more than test scores helped Barb counter the negative news coverage.

Dave tried to develop a greater understanding about the work he does with people who hold negative impressions of teachers. He worked to increase awareness for those who criticized teachers through sharing stories about his classroom. The misconceptions held about schools from the media, friends, and even educators discouraged Grace. She chose not to invest energy in increasing their understanding.

Julia found herself at holiday gatherings with family defending public education. Relatives who tried every option outside public schools did not provide a supportive network for Julia. On occasion, Julia had to disengage when family members engaged in "bashing public education."

Stakeholder expectations and demands produced stress and frustration for teachers in high-need schools. Ephemeral district imposed reforms stifled professional expertise and

hindered teacher efficacy. Structural changes imposed on schools disregarded the impact on school climate and inadvertent obstacles created for teachers in their daily work. The internal and external singular focus on student test scores ignored the many student needs teachers faced in high-need schools. However, participants in my research also related they found ways to cope that minimized the effect of negative factors on their motivation and commitment to high-need schools.

Coping Strategies

Some teachers detached emotionally as a way to protect themselves from the stress of the job. The stress came from many sources. Three of 15 participants spoke of emotionally detaching from their work in order to cope with the stress. When Tom re-entered teaching, he worked to shield himself from the constant public criticisms of schools. He had previously left teaching because he "took the pressure" for higher tests scores "too personally" and took his frustration home. Jade distanced herself from rude comments students made viewing them as reflections of the students' frustration. She admitted the comments hurt her feelings sometimes, but she tried not to take them personally.

Detaching provided an emotional buffer for Grace in her job. Grace described, "I have really distanced myself, like I don't get emotionally attached at all….Where before I would probably get a little more emotionally attached to kids, I'm not like that anymore at all." Grace empathized and cared for her students while purposely walling herself off emotionally. Grace distanced herself from the tough lives of her students – those things she could not change - to focus on making educational gains that held the potential to change their future.

Teachers took preventive measures in their private and professional lives to minimize pressures from work. Three out of 15 participants talked about benefiting from support outside

the school. Ruby engaged in "inner work" with a "spiritual teacher" for years. She processed work issues, and gained skills in communicating and relating with others during her spiritual work. Ivy felt fortunate to have a family and friend network supporting her in her work. Sofia believed dedicated teachers risked burnout unless they had a source of renewal. The constant drain from teaching threatened teachers who did not find "reservoirs" to replenish the energy consumed. She learned to establish boundaries around work while still meeting expectations of her job. Sofia believed maintaining hobbies and interests outside of work helped teachers renew themselves so they could meet the demands of teaching.

A proactive measure to alleviate stress at work included asking for help from others when needed. Feeling vulnerable inhibited some teachers from asking for help needed in their classrooms. Tom discovered novice teachers resisted asking for help because they wanted to "prove they can do it." He watched the unrelenting pressures at work crush teachers who struggled alone in their classroom. Tom viewed asking other staff for help essential for all teachers, not a sign of "weakness."

Ruby wrestled with the idea of telling her administrator she could not fulfill all the responsibilities assigned. She did not want to expose her vulnerability but felt overwhelmed with the demands of her job. Ruby resorted to sharing her frustrations with her boss who found other staff to assume some of the responsibilities. Ruby realized asking for help when needed represented a "healthy" response to the stress she experienced.

Teachers established limits and boundaries for themselves around work to curtail the effects of stress. Sofia accepted powerlessness over the many social and economic issues in her school, limiting her sphere of influence to teaching. Delineating her responsibilities helped Sofia focus on meeting the educational needs of students in her class so they could have a brighter

future. Ruby stated teachers needed to recognize their limitations because they could spend a lot of time and money addressing the boundless student needs in a high poverty school.

Lucy considered setting limits at work necessary in achieving balance needed as a teacher. She knew interests outside of school helped prevent work from consuming her life. Lucy recalled the mental health consequences for a teacher who "took the kids to games… took them to restaurants… bought stuff for the families… was gonna *[sic]* change the world, do everything." Lucy viewed this teacher a casualty of burnout because she had not set limits to establish balance in her life.

Five of 15 participants established boundaries to separate home and work. Ellie completed as much work as possible during her time at school and no longer took work home. She felt good about the clear boundaries established separating her "worlds" of work and school. Ellie reserved time at home to enjoy her "solitude…animals…and neighborhood friends." Jade restrained from taking work home, but knew achieving a work-home balance would take on more importance as she anticipated having children.

Julia had invested personal time at home to improve her teaching. The challenges made this a wasteful effort. Julia recognized a need to attain more balance in her life by establishing distinct boundaries between work and home. Julia felt maintaining "a life outside of these walls" helped avoid exhaustion and burn out. Mia found she needed to shut out work at the end of the day to avoid getting worn out. Her long drive home after work provided time to reconcile her day creating a boundary between work and home.

Grace established firm boundaries separating work and home. She restricted her work as a teacher to the defined duty day refusing to engage in work for school at home. Grace had

responsibilities for her own children and limited her role with students to seven hours a day. These boundaries helped Grace confine her roles and responsibilities to avoid frustration.

Humor helped some teachers manage stress and process serious work situations. During difficult days, Ivy reminded herself that someday she would look back and laugh about the situation. Julia enjoyed the students' humorous comments on a daily basis. She found things to laugh about even on difficult days. Humor had therapeutic value that helped Julia get through hard times and made work enjoyable. Grace found days never got so bad that she could not laugh about the situation.

Summary

Participants revealed a push-pull dynamic in their work - uncovering aspects of work motivating their continued effort and others deterring or undermining their commitment to teaching in high-need schools. Teachers worked to ensure the factors fostering commitment overshadowed those undercutting their commitment to their work. Participants described factors inside and outside high poverty schools decreasing teachers' commitment to their work. Student mobility and behavior directly affected the teacher in the classroom. Student behavior, mobility of staff and students, and internal and external pressures resulted in a lack of control, uncertainty, and stress for teachers. Teachers adopted coping strategies to prevent stress from threatening the satisfaction derived from their work.

In chapter six, I analyze my findings. I use several theories to analyze the findings described in chapters four and five related to teacher roles and self-efficacy, learning and professionalism, and the organizational factors affecting teacher commitment outside of the classroom. I also identify whether my findings corroborate or challenge results from previous studies on teacher commitment and work in high-needs schools.

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS

I explored the experiences of veteran teachers in high-need schools, focusing on aspects of their work affecting teacher commitment to continuing service in high poverty schools. Forming positive relationships, opportunities to grow in professionalism, and values and a history of service in high-need schools increased teacher satisfaction, confidence, and competency. Positive factors motivated teachers to continue working in these schools.

Frustrations and stresses decreased teacher commitment, causing them to feel ill equipped to teach and powerless to control different aspects of their work. Student behavior, mobility, and pressures from internal and external sources decreased teacher commitment to their work. Figure 1 illustrates the forces at work in increasing and decreasing commitment to working in high poverty schools.

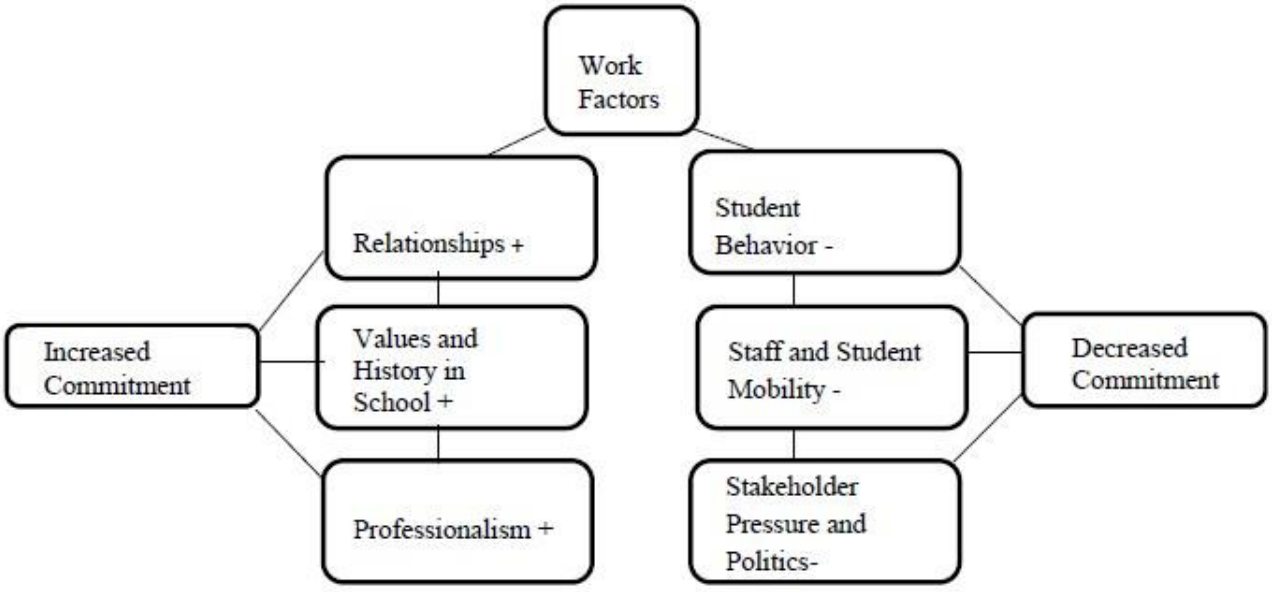

Figure 1. Factors increasing and decreasing commitment to work in high-need schools.

Teachers coped with mounting pressures in various ways. To sustain a commitment to teach in high-need schools, teachers worked to ensure factors increasing commitment outweighed those decreasing their commitment. Another coping strategy involved accessing professional development opportunities to increase knowledge of how to become a more capable teacher.

To analyze my findings, I first adopted Bandura's (1986, 1997) self-efficacy theory to explain how feeling in control of work creates conditions of increased competency, commitment, and professionalism. A reduction of self-efficacy creates feelings of incompetence and powerlessness, something "good" teachers hope to avoid. After showing the relationship between self-efficacy, commitment, and professionalism, I then analyze the organizational factors affecting teacher commitment using Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames. The "complex, surprising, deceptive, and ambiguous" nature of organizations makes them difficult to understand and operate (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 41). Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames model provides a broad view of the workings of organizations to gain clarity, generate ideas, and identify solutions to problems through four key perspectives: structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. A core assumption of self-efficacy concerns the importance of feeling in charge of one's work and life (Bandura, 1995, 1997).

The Relationship Between Self-Efficacy, Commitment, and Professionalism

Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory explains how factors interact to increase or decrease teacher's commitment to their work in high-need schools. "People guide their lives by their beliefs of personal efficacy" (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). Bandura's self-efficacy theory asserts people exert control over their lives to attain benefits and avoid undesired outcomes striving to maximize desired outcomes by relying on the belief they can successfully do what they need to do. The benefit of using self-efficacy theory rests in its capacity to predict and explain the

behavior of people (Bandura, 1995, 1997). The theory of self-efficacy holds potential for developing and increasing efficacy (Bandura, 1995).

Bandura (1997) determined four sources influence the development of self-efficacy including mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social influences, and self-evaluation of capabilities. Mastery experiences occur through cognitive interpretation of success or failure in performing certain behaviors. Models offer vicarious experiences, and foster growth in self-efficacy when individuals observe different strategies and social comparisons. Bandura also described verbal persuasion as views others communicate about a person's capabilities to succeed. The influence of emotional states on self-efficacy depends on how individuals perceive and interpret their own feelings (Bandura, 1997).

Bandura (1997) claimed that self-efficacy affects how people manage responsibilities and challenges of their work. For example, the efficacy beliefs people hold determine goals they adopt, their commitment to these goals, and their response to setbacks and challenges. In addition, according to Bandura's self-efficacy theory, efficacy influences the challenges people take on, the effort put into undertakings, the amount of perseverance needed to manage difficulties, the quality of systematic thinking, and the susceptibility to stress. Organizational circumstances may promote or undermine the beliefs people hold about their efficacy and exacerbate effects of those with low "coping efficacy" (Bandura, 1997, p. 464). Conditions working against efficacy in organizations include "heavy workloads…poor prospects for occupational advancement, and an unsatisfying imbalance between one's work life and one's personal life" (Bandura, 1997, p. 464). Structures in organizations often "breed conflicts and create impediments to fulfilling role demands within available resources" (Bandura, 1997, p. 464).

Dealing with stress at work requires change at both a personal and an organizational level according to Bandura (1997). At the organizational level, efforts to reduce stress need to consider work practices that undercut employees' efficacy. People need to feel control over matters at work directly affecting them and their sense of personal accomplishment; this sense of control and social support also influences how people decide to cope or manage stress at work (Bandura, 1997). For example, a person could seek more training to increase knowledge, find ways to manage demands more efficiently, or create boundaries around work and home (Bandura, 1997).

Perceived self-efficacy refers to a person's belief they can produce a specific outcome (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1997) asserted that personal efficacy relies more on estimations of success in performing a task rather than actual performance. Specifically, the beliefs people hold about their potential to do what they need to do, influence actions they pursue, their effort and perseverance, their response to stress, the quality of systematic thinking, and their achievements. Mastery experiences provide teachers with genuine information about whether they could perform successfully (Bandura, 1997). Gains in self-efficacy increased teachers' commitment to work in high-need schools.

How Teachers Increase Self-Efficacy

Mastery experiences enhancing self-efficacy of teachers occurred when students expressed new learning, used a strategy, improved behavior, and showed responsibility for their learning. Teachers interpreted this to mean they had what it takes to work with high poverty students. The impact of successful mastery experiences on teacher efficacy for student teachers (Knoblauch & Woolfolk, 2008) validated the importance of succeeding at challenging assignments. However, teacher efficacy developed through field experiences remained

vulnerable to failures experienced in early stages of teaching (Hoy & Spero, 2005). With successful experiences under their belt, veteran teachers reflected on unsuccessful experiences in the classroom that compromised their confidence and altered their approach to achieve their goal. While repeated early failures threaten self-efficacy, the experience of overcoming difficulties strengthened efficacy, persistence, and skills needed to control events (Bandura, 1997).

Teachers experienced positive outcomes from relationships with students and parents, and their history in high-need schools. Believing good relationships with students and families helped them achieve outcomes in the classroom, teachers found ways to develop positive relationships. Parent conferences, phone contacts, and student mentoring became avenues for developing relationships teachers believed helped them meet the ultimate goal of making student progress. Teachers experienced social persuasion through encounters with former students who shared fond memories of their classroom experience, positive interactions with parents during conferences, and parents' requests to have their children in a teacher's classroom. Positive relationships with students, families, and colleagues provided opportunities for teachers to heighten self-efficacy through achieving successful outcomes and avoiding negative consequences.

Close relationships with colleagues supported efficacy because teachers gained advice and social support from others with similar experience. Social persuasion refers to more than "pep talks" (Bandura, 1997, p. 106). Waddell (2010) found the social persuasion of principals and coworkers affected novice teachers' self-efficacy lending support for the significance participants placed on supportive relationships with colleagues. Teachers felt their colleagues "had their back" and the teachers on their team were in it together.

Relationships with colleagues provided the support teachers needed to successfully navigate challenges, avoid failures, and reduce stress. This agrees in part with Anderson's (2010) findings that supportive networks helped teachers overcome issues in the workplace. Support in Anderson's study, however, included a combination of school-based and outside school connections. Veteran teachers relied on collegial support within the school to manage work challenges. Teachers relied on the verbal support of colleagues in their school who understood the realities of working in a high-need school.

Teachers developed efficacy beliefs working with diverse, high poverty students and functioning in high poverty schools through experience. Payne (1994) suggested non-African American teachers in urban schools increased self-efficacy as they became more comfortable in diverse settings, established relationships with students, and experienced success. Perceived self-efficacy influences a person's choice of actions, level of motivation, and acquisition of new knowledge (Bandura, 1997). Believing in the school's academic programming and seeing improvement in the school, teachers thought their efforts would lead to positive outcomes for students. Their history in high-need schools resulted in teachers believing they had acquired the skills to succeed in their work. Pragmatically comparing their work to other people, teachers believed they would not avoid problems through a career change. Teachers experienced positive outcomes from their job because of their skills and did not believe leaving their career would alleviate negative outcomes encountered.

A strong sense of efficacy influences a person's interest, involvement, and willingness to face challenges (Bandura, 1997). Efficacious people set high goals, think strategically, attribute failure to a lack of effort, recover quickly from setbacks, and face increasing challenges with

confidence (Bandura, 1997). Professionals acquire certain needed skills and knowledge through specialized training and put them into practice (Bandura, 1997).

Developing or enhancing efficacy through vicarious experiences depends on how the person interprets the social comparison (Bandura, 1997). Teachers valued learning from grade level team members who they believed knew the curriculum and understood how to work with students at a specific grade level. Teachers specializing in an academic area such as math looked to other math specialists for support believing these math specialists had a deeper understanding of the content and specialized knowledge to share. Tucker et al., (2005) confirmed training and on-going coaching holds potential for increasing teacher efficacy for working with students from diverse backgrounds.

Teachers pursued growth in their profession through trainings, acquiring new positions, and observing student learning to achieve improved outcomes in teaching. This indicates a belief in the capacity to change and adapt to meet the demands of their work through the acquisition of new skills from classroom experience and on-going training. Viewing ability as acquired rather than innate sustains and enhances self-efficacy (Wood & Bandura, 1989). People who believed they acquired ability though hard work developed resilient self-efficacy, especially useful during times of adversity (Wood & Bandura, 1989). These people continued to set high goals and engage in problem solving (Wood & Bandura, 1989).

Efficacy beliefs led some teachers to look for new challenges in different positions to maximize their impact on the school. In related literature, Hunter-Quartz (2003) found professional growth opportunities and job advancement encouraged retention of social justice educators in urban schools. Actively seeking learning opportunities focused on their area of interest demonstrated how teachers work toward increasing self-efficacy. Faced with obstacles,

these teachers problem solved, engaged in self-reflection, maintained high expectations, and remained resilient. Because these veteran teachers had established a sense of efficacy, overcoming challenges in their high-need school served to enhance their efficacy (Bandura, 1995).

Teacher Experiences Threatening Self-Efficacy

Teachers pursued and adapted behavior management strategies to deal with student behavior, increasing positive outcomes and avoiding negative consequences. An increase in the ability to anticipate and manage possible threats allows people to gain the confidence needed in managing future situations (Bandura, 1997). In spite of their efficacious approach, teachers still faced severe behavior and mental health issues. Although teachers developed skills to deal with many daily behavior issues, they could not always predict student outbursts and sometimes doubted their ability to handle severe behavior and mental health issues decreasing their commitment and self-efficacy.

The influence of modeling on efficacy relies on the similarity of the models (Bandura, 1995). Working with other teachers in the school struggling with behavior or organizational structures deprived teachers of successful models impacting teachers' efficacy. Modeling experiences strongly influence performance when people view models as similarly competent (Brown & Inouye, 1978). The frequency and severity of student behavior took time from instruction, created an unpredictable environment, and impeded the teacher's sense of control. These experiences created stress, decreased commitment, and challenged teachers' views of their success as teachers. Believing a lack of control exists in the environment leads to harmful effects on self-efficacy (Bandura & Wood, 1989). Coladarci (1992) found personal and general teacher efficacy holds the greatest potential for predicting teachers' commitment to teaching.

Staff mobility inhibited the benefits typically derived from mutual and supportive collegial relationships. The hesitancy of new staff to ask colleagues for help threatened efficacy due to their lack of mastery experiences, exposure to models, and social persuasion. The revolving door of teachers and administrators created an unstable environment for new and existing staff, and constant changes in the level of self and collective efficacy. Self-efficacy affected how teachers learned to operate in their school, understood their role as teachers, managed time, collaborated with co-workers, and handled the demands of their jobs.

Teachers took actions to avoid undesired career outcomes. People constantly make decisions about actions to take and how long to pursue them (Bandura, 1982). When teachers believed an advanced degree might result in having to take an unwanted position, they chose not to pursue the degree to avoid this consequence. Faced with involuntary placements, teachers considered options to regain control over their careers. At times, this included pursuing additional licenses, dropping licenses, or taking a leave of absence.

Changes in school structures and shifting reform efforts imposed by the school district created daily obstacles for teachers. Structural changes affecting the size of staff created an impersonal environment, reducing and sometimes limiting how teachers might work together and learn from each other. Teachers benefited from knowing they had overcome obstacles imposed on them from the district in the past and acquired skills to work around organizational constraints (Bandura, 1986).

District reform initiatives required large investments of time from teachers and lacked opportunities to build self-efficacy through positive feedback. Teachers described district-mandated initiatives as having short life spans, lacking feedback on benefits gained, and no opportunity to make changes to increase efficacy. Bandura (1995, 1997) argued people need

opportunities to increase their success combined with positive (constructive) feedback. Teachers believed the focus on increasing test scores and ratings deterred personal efficacy. Stakeholders used school wide test results to impose sanctions on schools rather than provide helpful performance information and growth opportunities for teachers.

Teachers experienced distress as a result of involuntary migration to other schools or grade levels, managing student behavior, or feeling pressure from stakeholders. Teachers' responses to stress included adapting to changes, moving to other schools, or taking a leave of absence. The experience of stress comes at a cost – teachers experienced negative emotions and loss of control. Physiological and emotional states provide information people use to appraise their capacity; they interpret stress and tension as indications they will perform poorly (Bandura, 1995, 1997). Adverse circumstances challenged positive emotions and outcomes, and decreased teacher commitment to high-need schools.

Teachers also developed coping strategies such as establishing work boundaries, separating work and home, and humor to manage stress and sustain efforts in the school. Teachers received support in school from colleagues as well as family, friends, and social networks outside school. Receiving encouragement from significant others helped teachers put forth effort and try harder to succeed (Bandura, 1997).

Teachers' relationships with students, families, and colleagues throughout their history working in high-need schools resulted in enhanced self-efficacy, increasing commitment to their work. Teachers interpreted mastery experiences in classrooms and connections with former students as evidence of their success. Learning through colleagues and professional development increased professional expertise leading teachers to believe they could change and adapt to face the demands of their job. Increased self-efficacy and professionalism led to taking

on new challenges and positions. Teachers' inability to predict and confidently handle student behavior, mobility, and demands of stakeholders threatened self-efficacy and decreased commitment.

Circumstances outside a teacher's control affected his or her commitment to service. Organizational conditions imposed by the school, district, or community also influenced professionalism, self-efficacy, and commitment. Next, I use Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frame model to analyze organizational factors affecting teacher commitment in high-need schools beginning with the structural frame.

Organizational Factors Affecting Teacher Commitment

Structural Frame

Organizations rely on structures to coordinate efforts to increase efficiency, maximize performance, and achieve organizational goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Structures designed to suit the special circumstances of an organization support both the employee and organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). A formal structure boosts morale when it assists people in getting work done and inhibits satisfaction when it "buries [people] in red tape, or makes it too easy for management to control" them (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 51).

Coordination of the work in organizations occurs through vertical and lateral forms of communication (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The vertical coordination of work relies on people high on the chain of command directing work through rules and policies to maximize organizational outcomes (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Vertical coordination from the school district to increase student test scores accompanied heightened control and oversight of schools not meeting a specified goal. This top-down management included the constant threat of closing schools that

did not improve. The risk of closure loomed over all teachers in the school, even teachers achieving good results with students.

Vertical coordination of work assumes focusing on a set standard would ensure quality products and services (Bolman & Deal, 2008). From this perspective, identifying goals for student achievement in the form of a test score clearly communicates the standard for schools to meet. However, teaching involves a "complex and less predictable" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 64) process because outcomes and strategies need to vary depending on the student. Contrary to business that can measure goal attainment through increased profits, educational goals focus on preparing the whole child for her or his future (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Measuring goals for student achievement through test results represents only one of many important educational goals. For example, teachers often believe education helps students learn about themselves and develop positive relationships with others.

Teachers objected to receiving directives from the central office in the form of new initiatives and changes in systems adopted to manage instruction while ignoring their professional expertise and discretion. Previous research linked organizational conditions supporting autonomy and input in decision-making to commitment of teachers (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990). Additionally, Ingersoll (2001a/b, 2003) found a lack of input in decision-making, student behavior, low salaries, and poor administrative support attributed to teacher attrition. Teachers, like other highly educated individuals, expect greater discretion and autonomy in their daily routine (Bolman & Deal, 2008). However, the district reforms required in schools created additional work for teachers, restricted professional autonomy, and took away from valued instructional time.

The school district made changes in school structures, such as merging schools, changing grade configurations, and housing two schools in the same building. These undesirable changes reflect the vulnerability of teachers in high-need schools to outside influence due to an inability to "claim the resources they need or to shape the results they are supposed to produce" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 65). Structural changes imposed on schools had implications for teachers, including disruptions in school climate, conflict between staff, and stress from overcrowding. In spite of the difficult work conditions created through structural changes, the district expected schools to produce good results with students. The vertical structure presented a structural deficiency for teachers that made working in high-need schools more stressful and less fulfilling. The top-down management style did not fit the complex process of teaching or provide the professional autonomy needed by a highly educated workforce. These circumstances created tensions between teachers and the school district.

Teachers experienced stress and felt conflicted about the school district when faced with teacher layoffs. From a structural perspective, rules and policies help put the "people in the right roles and relationships" to maximize an organization's performance (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 47). Rules and policies stipulate procedures for managing personnel issues and completing tasks to ensure consistent, impartial treatment from the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Policies applied to school staffing during budget shortfalls compelled teachers to leave schools involuntarily and change schools frequently. Involuntary mobility of staff created disruptions in teachers' careers, placed unmotivated teachers in high-need schools, split-up colleagues with established relationships, and maintained unstable conditions in schools with high turnover. Policies and procedures resulted in losing promising young teachers, offering positions to teachers close to the beginning of the school year, and assigning teachers to undesired teaching

positions. Structural changes also contribute to the competition for scarce resources, creating conflict within schools and increased "politics."

Political Frame

The political frame offers insight into interactions occurring between coalitions with different values, concerns, and perspectives within organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Limited resources and different perspectives of coalitions lead to conflict as each group uses its power to get its needs met (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Coalitions with conflicting but interdependent interests vying for resources face conflict (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

External stakeholders included the general public and media interested and invested in education. These external stakeholders believed in holding schools and teachers accountable for student achievement based on standardized test scores. This coalition wielded significant power through financial support, legislative influence, and the ability to mold public perception through the media. Internal stakeholders comprised of school district leadership represent a coalition needing successful schools to preserve a good public relations image. The mobilization of power from coalitions with divergent preferences determines who most influences decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The power of external stakeholders made them influential in defining success in schools through the metrics of standardized test scores. External stakeholders had significant power to leverage in determining the definition of success internal stakeholders used to measure the success of teachers and schools.

Internal stakeholders needed schools to obtain a high percentage of students' proficient on standardized tests and meet the growth goals specified by the State as a measure of continued progress. This coalition consisted of school district leadership with authority to increase oversight of a school, close or reconstitute schools, and direct school initiatives. Teachers as a

coalition in high-need schools struggled to provide the background information needed to teach students, deal with significant student behavior and mental health issues, and provide differentiated instruction to teach all students.

The myopic focus on student test scores, combined with the instructional initiatives imposed on schools without sensitivity to local conditions and restriction of professional autonomy, created tensions between these coalitions. Reduction in teacher retention occurs from pressures placed on teachers working in high poverty schools during this era of accountability and public scrutiny (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). Independence and input into decision-making remain central to teacher commitment and retention (Greenlee & Brown, 2009; Rosenholtz & Simpson, 1990) while the society's low regard for educators results in dissatisfaction for teachers (Kearney, 2008). The political forces at work in public schools with large populations of high-need students predict a need to manage uncertainty and find meaning in work through symbolism.

Symbolic Frame

The symbolic frame offers a window into interpretations of peoples' work experiences through symbols they create to handle ambiguity and doubt (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Visions, values, rituals, and ceremonies buried within events and practices convey critical information about the culture of an organization that unites people (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Organizational culture and symbols reveal how people make meaning of their work (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

Organizational values communicate a "sense of identity…, and help people feel special about what they do" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 255). Teachers found work in high-need schools supported values they held about education. Personal experiences of teachers contributed to their

belief that a brighter future for economically disadvantaged children depended on access to a good education.

Teachers believing poverty stemmed from structural sources outside individual control thought they might make a difference in the lives of students, stayed in high poverty schools longer, and achieved more satisfaction (Robinson, 2007). Participants' preservice experiences with immigrant families, schools with similar demographics, or high poverty communities initiated a desire to work in high-need schools. These early positive experiences influenced teachers' commitment to working in high-need schools from the beginning of their career. This agrees in part with Chapman's (1984) and Chapman and Green's (1986) model connecting initial commitment to teach with career satisfaction and retention. Chapman (1984) and Chapman and Green (1986) also found early teaching experiences significant for teacher retention.

Teacher beliefs and experiences in high-need schools can influence them to stay (Haberman & Post, 1998; Rinke, 2011; Robinson, 2007). Participants developed a sense of belonging and knew others valued their work in high-need schools. This aligned with their convictions about education. Based on experience in these schools, teachers believed they could fulfill their purpose: to help educate economically disadvantaged students to ensure a brighter future.

Organizational values people regard most important include those they observe through behavior within the organization (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Behavior in schools demonstrating values included school staffing to support programming for English language learners, structuring the environment so students felt safe, and providing equal access to a quality educational program within a school. Compatibility between a teacher's educational beliefs and accepted practice in the school proved important to retention in schools (Santoro & Morehouse,

2011; Swars et al., 2009). The school vision to educate all students inspired teachers as positive academic or behavior changes occurred in their schools.

Stories preserve values and immortalize legendary feats (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Teaching abounds with heroes and heroines, especially in the inner-city, creating stereotypes that misrepresent the work and career expectations of teachers. Stories popular within the general public depict the inner city teacher miraculously transforming a chaotic classroom filled with underperforming, unmotivated students into scholars. The protagonist teacher's passion to teach becomes all-consuming and life revolves around teaching. Participants used these stereotypes to clarify and limit their role as a teacher in a high poverty school. Teachers countered with stories of how they planned, taught, and reflected on instruction to make significant progress with a student.

Rituals provide a way to initiate those new to a group into membership (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Parent-teacher conferences in schools provided a way for teachers to introduce parents to their classroom. Teachers used this ritual to explain grade level academic expectations, classroom rules, share information about a child's progress with parents, and gauge parental support. Teachers interpreted a high turnout at parent-teacher conferences as parental interest and support for a child's education. Because parent involvement held significant meaning for teachers, they tried numerous strategies to draw parents into the school. Rituals also serve to form a bond and develop the organizational culture through traditions (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Teachers viewed parent-teacher conferences as a way to bring a child's family into the educational process. Symbolism created in public schools unites people and makes meaning of work based largely in interpersonal relationships.

Human Resource Frame

The work of teachers examined through a human resource lens places interpersonal relationships at the center. Because work requires people to interact frequently with others to complete their tasks, both employee satisfaction and organizational success rely on quality interpersonal relationships (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Teachers developed relationships through frequent interactions with other teachers, administrators, and students. Both teachers and students benefited from the relationships developed in the classroom. Teachers believed student-teacher relationships helped build rapport and trust, resulting in improved student learning. Relationships with students raised teachers' satisfaction and enjoyment of work. Positive relationships between teachers and students affected job satisfaction (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Bridwell, 2012; Brunetti, 200l; Brunetti et al., 2006; Marston et al., 2004; Nieto, 2001, 2003; Shann, 1998).

Visits from former students supported teachers' belief that connections with students made a difference and the effort they put into their teaching mattered. Teachers experienced increased job satisfaction when they felt they made a difference in the lives of their students (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Brunetti, 2001; Petty et al., 2011). Feeling successful influenced teacher's desire to continue to teach (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003; Ng & Peter, 2010).

Relationships with colleagues made work enjoyable and provided a caring, supportive work environment. The relationships with other employees at work can lead to the "highs and lows" in a person's career (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 168). Relationships with colleagues provided social conditions motivating for teachers (Brunetti, 2001, Brunetti et al., 2006; Johnson et al., 2007; Marston et al., 2004; Waddell, 2010). Teachers considered relationships with fellow teachers as very close - more like "friends" or "family" then co-workers. They trusted these

colleagues and knew they could count on them for support. In these relationships, teachers gained strength from each other to face adversities and experienced pleasure working with people they enjoyed.

Working together in teams helps people gain access to knowledge, viewpoints, and energy they would not have working in isolation (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Teachers relied on their grade level teams to share expertise about the curriculum, engage in problem solving about classroom dilemmas, and teach together during co-teaching opportunities. Teachers credited their team for helping them acquire new strategies, do their best teaching, and maximize the use of curriculum. Teachers gained professional expertise and enjoyment through positive relationships with colleagues and students increasing commitment to work. The examination of the work world of teachers revealed factors increasing and decreasing commitment to work in high-need schools.

Summary

Two theories provided insight into organizational aspects affecting the commitment of teachers to work in high-need schools. Bandura's (1997) self-efficacy theory explained how feeling in control of work promotes competency, commitment, and professionalism, and how other factors diminish self-efficacy, causing people to feel helpless and inept. People seek activities they feel confident they can do well (Bandura, 1982). Teachers experienced conditions that fed and drained self-efficacy, commitment, and professionalism.

Pursuing and developing relationships with students, families, and colleagues helped teachers achieve desired outcomes and avoid negative consequences. Current and former students' expressions of learning supported teachers' efficacy beliefs that they could teach students in high-need schools. Positive relationships with parents and colleagues provided

verbal persuasion in the form of advice and support for teachers increasing efficacy. Teachers' history working in diverse, high poverty schools strengthened efficacy beliefs motivating them to take on new challenges and acquire new skills. Taking charge of their professional growth in areas of interest increased skills resulting in increased efficacy and professionalism.

Teachers' inability to predict and control student behavior, mobility, and the demands of stakeholders threatened efficacy and decreased commitment. Unpredictable student behavior interfered with the teacher's sense of control over the learning environment diminishing self-efficacy. Another threat to the teachers' sense of control occurred through involuntary mobility of staff. Staff mobility resulted in a constant influx of new teachers in some schools disrupting benefits teachers' gain through social persuasion. Performance feedback occurring through stakeholders' use of assessment results failed to support efficacy of teachers and decreased commitment. The influence of conditions within the school system on teacher self-efficacy, professionalism, and commitment suggests looking more deeply into the organization.

Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frames provided different angles for understanding how factors in the organization influenced teachers' commitment to continuing work in high-need schools. Looking at the world of teachers through structural, political, symbolic, and human resource perspectives helps uncover what is going on and what to do about it (Bolman & Deal, 2008). From a structural viewpoint, the top-down management style restricted professional autonomy, and policies resulting in layoffs during budget shortfalls created uncertainty that decreased commitment of teachers to work in high-need schools. Coalitions operating within the political frame jockeyed to influence the focus and priorities of schools. External and internal stakeholders' pressure to increase student test scores restricted teacher autonomy creating tensions between coalitions and decreased commitment.

The symbolic frame offers a glimpse into organizational values teachers supported, and kept them committed to their work in high-need schools. During their history in high-need schools, teachers observed organizational values in practice that aligned with their educational philosophy. The human resource lens provides insight into a key component of teaching – interpersonal relationships. Through their relationships with students and colleagues, teachers improved learning for students, enjoyed their work, and increased commitment.

Self-efficacy explained how teachers' perception of their ability to control organizational conditions to attain their ultimate goal of educating students in high-need schools increased or decreased commitment. Peoples' desire to achieve positive outcomes guides behavior and commitment (Bandura, 1997). Bolman and Deal's (2008) four frame model provided a lens to examine how different components of the teachers' world function to increase or decrease their commitment.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I examined how veteran teachers working in high-need urban schools with economically disadvantaged students experience and make meaning of their work. Teachers interpret and adapt to experiences within and outside schools to form career attitudes and make career decisions (Yee, 1990). In this chapter, I summarize findings regarding teachers' commitment to work in high-need schools and describe implications and recommendations based on these findings. When recommendations agree with those made in earlier studies, I cite these studies to provide additional support to my ideas. I then recommend areas for further research and present limitations before concluding this chapter.

Relationships with students, parents, and colleagues provide a strong foundation for teacher commitment and student learning. Because relationships underpin commitment and student learning, they rank at the top of the list of work conditions for teachers.

Relationships

Participants claimed relationships with students, parents, and colleagues motivated them to continue teaching in high-need schools. Positive relationships made work enjoyable and fulfilling for participants. Academic growth of current and former students resulted in greater job satisfaction and increased commitment for participants.

Teacher-Student Relationships

Participants identified their personal commitment and concern for current and former students as key reasons for staying at their school. Participants believed the rapport established created a trusting, safe environment where students could take risks in learning without fear of making mistakes. Interactions with former students served to remind participants of their capacity to make a lasting impression in someone's life.

The study revealed the importance of promoting and sustaining positive relationships between teachers and students. Similar to other studies, relationships with students proved motivating for teachers on two levels. First, teachers enjoyed interacting and working with students (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Brunetti, 2001). Second, teachers' job satisfaction increased when they felt they succeeded in making a difference in the lives of their students (Bradley & Loadman, 2005; Brunetti, 2001; Petty et al., 2011).

In response to these findings, I recommend establishing times and strategies to develop relationships with current students at the beginning of the school year. Class activities and meetings focused on getting to know students lay the foundation for relationships. Strengthening relationships with students requires finding time to meet with students outside instructional periods, such as eating lunch occasionally with small groups of students. The short-term sacrifice of giving up lunchtime holds potential for long-term benefits of increased job satisfaction. A mentoring program sponsored within each school may support relationships between students and teachers.

Parent-Teacher Relationships

Participants described feeling supported, trusted, and valued through positive relationships with parents increasing their motivation to continue working in their school. These relationships helped participants form a partnership with parents in the educational process of students. Discomfort with a school setting and constraints within parents' lives made it difficult for some parents to interact with school staff. Participants' valued relationships with parents and sought strategies to improve communication with parents and strengthen the home-school connection.

This study adds to studies regarding the need to strengthen the home-school connection through the parent-teacher relationships. Teachers view parental support critical to student achievement (Johnson et al., 2007). Examining factors contributing to job satisfaction in urban middle school teachers, Shann (1998) found teachers most concerned about the parent-teacher relationship. Parents living in poverty and teachers may have divergent views of the purpose and meaning of parent involvement (Lawson, 2003). Developing positive relationships with parents in high poverty schools requires consideration of barriers impeding parent participation including lack of transportation, childcare, phone, and time (Haeseler, 2011). Teachers need to remain sensitive to the needs of families when initiating contact (Haeseler, 2011).

I recommend the ideas Haeseler (2011) listed for improving parent involvement at the school level. This included providing childcare during school events, providing greater flexibility in scheduling of events at school, offering classes of interest to parents, and providing transportation to school functions. As recommended by Matuszny, Banda, and Coleman (2007), establishing informal school sponsored events before school starts in the fall provides opportunities for parents and teachers to get to know each other outside their formal roles. These events and conferences should be held at a location convenient for parents. Lastly, I recommend a school-wide door knocking campaign by groups of teachers to invite parents to school events, providing meals at school events, and parenting classes to support working with their child on academics at home.

Collegial Relationships

Participants claimed relationships with colleagues created an enjoyable, caring community inspiring them to continue working in their school. Teachers in my study expressed feeling needed, supported, and valued in these close relationships with coworkers. Participants

believed they could count on team-mates for support during difficult times. Relationships with colleagues played an invaluable role guarding against isolation, discouragement, and despair. These positive relationships with colleagues led to sharing expertise that contributed to participants' professional growth.

The study revealed the need to foster collegial relationships in high poverty schools. Relationships with colleagues constitute work conditions important to teacher satisfaction and decisions to remain at a high poverty school (Johnson et al., 2007). Focusing on improving social conditions within the school held promise for reducing turnover and increasing teacher commitment to their work in high-need schools (Johnson et al., 2007). Relationships with coworkers supported internal factors such as self-efficacy and helped when "district mandates" and pressures intensified for teachers (Waddell, 2010. p. 76).

Waddell (2010) suggested focusing on changing social conditions within the school to increase commitment. This could occur without new initiatives, resources, or costs to the school (Waddell, 2010). At the school level, I recommend structuring specialist periods to allow for common planning time. Providing opportunities for teachers to get to know each other before school starts, carefully planning to orient new staff, pairing new staff with seasoned teachers, and structuring opportunities for teachers to work together to improve use of the curriculum also fosters collegial relationships.

Professionalism

Participants described their professionalism as evolving through professional development, collaborating with other teachers, and daily experiences in the classroom. Participants expected to continue to learn new strategies, adapt their instruction, and improve teaching throughout their career. They expressed feeling assured about meeting the needs of

students because of their increased understanding of the content, ability to adjust instruction, and knowledge of methods used successfully in the past. In addition, participants identified increased commitment to teach when they observed students' progress in learning. Participants pursued professional growth opportunities and took on new roles to increase knowledge in areas of interest demonstrating a desire for autonomy and control over their professional growth and career.

The findings indicate a need for teachers to engage in on-going professional growth opportunities in areas of interest. Nieto (2001) found developing professionally served as one reason high school urban teachers stayed in the profession. I agree with Nieto's (2001) recommendation to find ways to support professional development, allowing teachers to determine the focus of their continued development, to create opportunities for professional conversations among teachers, and to form study groups. More programs within the school and district should expand teacher expertise, and provide ways for teachers to participate in peer coaching opportunities.

Values and a History of Service in High-Need Schools

Participants expressed how their educational values were shaped by their personal experiences. Their commitment to serving students in high-need schools increased in schools demonstrating values consistent with their beliefs about education. Teachers want to teach in a successful school. Participants expressed hope in the progress made in their school and wanted to play a part in the school's future.

The study revealed the importance of teachers determining whether a school is a "good fit" for them. This fit might include working in a high poverty school. Robinson (2007) found if teachers believed poverty stemmed from societal conditions rather than individual traits, they

were more likely to view classroom problems as fixable and to extend their length of tenure in high-need schools. In order to prepare teachers for work in high poverty schools, I recommend teacher education programs implement Robinson's (2007) idea to incorporate sociology classes focused on poverty as required coursework.

Participants described learning about different cultures and developing a greater cultural and socio-economic awareness to help in meeting student needs. Knowing how a student's life in poverty affected his or her behavior and performance at school helped participants adapt their teaching and assume multiple roles to meet the physical, safety, educational, and emotional needs of students. Participants acquired greater expertise and confidence teaching diverse student populations increasing their commitment to work in high-need schools.

Participants expressed a realistic outlook about their work, important in maintaining their perspective when faced with disappointments and struggles. They believed changing schools or careers only altered work issues, leading them to find ways to cope with frustrations and to problem solve difficulties in their work. Participants expressed abandoning unrealistic expectations of themselves in favor of attainable goals focused on skillful instruction.

The study revealed the need to provide professional development tailored to teachers working in high-need schools. Haberman and Post's (1998) study of teachers working with students in poverty also found teachers valued professional development. They offered three suggestions: (1) providing credible mentors, based on experience teaching high poverty students, (2) establishing teams to encourage teachers to learn from each other, and (3) offering professional development to address immediate concerns of teachers provided by a teacher with knowledge and experience working with students living in poverty.

I agree with Haberman and Post's (1998) recommendation to ensure regular contact with other teachers in high-need schools. This team approach encourages professional conversations to problem solve issues, provides a support system, and offers opportunities to share daily successes. Conversations with other teachers reduce isolation and create a sense of community. Talking with teachers who share a common experience may remind teachers why they teach in high-need schools.

Relationships, professionalism, and a history of service led to increased commitment of teachers to their work in high-need schools. Recommendations included in this section offer strategies to employ at the school level and teacher level with potential for increasing teacher commitment to continue their work in high-need schools. Next, I summarize major findings, implications, and recommendations of factors decreasing commitment beginning with student behavior.

Student Behavior

The condition in high poverty schools of concern to most participants involved dealing with student behavior. Participants described student behavior as overshadowing the attention placed on academic instruction and draining teachers' energy. They described frequent and severe student behaviors, such as crying, screaming, fighting, and aggression against staff. These student behaviors, a reality of their work, demanded changes in teacher practices and acquisition of classroom management skills to maintain an orderly environment conducive to learning. Even with the additional attention to classroom management, participants expressed a belief in the capacity of their students to meet high expectations for behavior, and they kept expectations high.

The study revealed the need to provide teachers training to deescalate and manage student behavior. At the school level, I recommend providing training in behavior management found effective for teachers new to working in high poverty schools. I also recommend teachers develop classroom behavior management plans with their team to encourage learning from other teachers and to structure support for new teachers.

Participants expressed uncertainty dealing with mental health issues of students. Behaviors of students struggling with social-emotional problems put all students' safety at risk, impeded the instruction of all students, and drained teachers' physical and emotional energy. Participants identified the number of students struggling with mental health issues as a distinguishing feature of their school. Feeling ill-equipped to deal with the social-emotional problems of many of their students, participants supported mental health professionals providing services in schools.

The study revealed the consequences on teachers of frequent and severe student behaviors stemming from mental health issues. Although some schools currently provided mental health services, others did not. Lortie (1975) found elementary teachers interested in working with children "under normal conditions that don't include sickness, poverty, or emotional disturbance" (p. 27). I recommend the school district ensure mental health services provided in schools adequately address the number of students needing service to address behavioral issues that disrupt the class environment.

At the school level, I recommend providing mental health service professionals in high poverty schools to support teachers lacking confidence in their work with students demonstrating mental health concerns. Mental health service professionals need to communicate with parents to put them at ease and reduce the stigmatization connected with mental health issues. To help

teachers in the classroom, I recommend schools engage mental health professionals, experienced in working with children living in poverty, in ongoing conversations with teachers about specific mental health issues. These ongoing conversations on issues, such as depression, trauma, or stress may empower teachers to incorporate strategies into their learning environments.

Mobility

Mobility of staff and students emerged as a factor negatively affecting teacher commitment. Participants experienced a lack of control and loss of relationships when staff or students left their school.

Staff Mobility

Participants expressed a lack of control over their careers occurring from involuntary teacher mobility affecting their morale, expertise, and school climate. Participants expressed the need for highly motivated teachers to work in high-need schools. Participants described attempts to regain control over their careers by obtaining additional licenses, dropping licenses, or not pursuing advanced degrees. Teachers in my study described frequent changes in administration also created instability as the vision of the school shifted and the relationship with a new administrator remained uncertain.

The study revealed the need to stabilize staff in high-need schools. High turnover indicates problems within an organization and creates problems for the organization (Ingersoll, 2003; Mobley, 1982). Economic and student enrollment fluctuations make school district budgets and staffing difficult to predict (Duke, 1984). When school district budget cuts occur, collective bargaining determines the process for teacher layoffs. I recommend the school district, teachers' union, and teachers examine possible ways to stabilize high poverty schools through restricting involuntary mobility of teachers and principals. The school district and

teachers' union should establish a memorandum of agreement to limit layoffs of teachers in high poverty schools. Working with individual principals, the school district should identify the support needed to achieve success in stabilizing high-need schools.

Student Mobility

Participants claimed student mobility made it difficult for them to prepare in advance for their students. They described interruptions in educational programming for students who moved and then returned creating a lack of continuity in the students' education. This lack of continuity made it difficult for participating teachers to feel successful. They expressed difficulty in gauging the impact of their school's academic program when students moved frequently.

The study revealed the consequence of student mobility on teachers' ability to plan for students and determine if their instruction made a difference. Teachers in urban elementary schools described strategies for handling students entering and leaving their classroom (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). I recommend Lash and Kirkpatrick's (1990) strategies to review explicit behavior and learning behavior frequently with the class, gain familiarity with various curriculum and assessments used to identify gaps for students, remain flexible with instructional strategies and groupings, and prepare students to move to other schools when possible. I also recommend Lash and Kirkpatrick's idea of incorporating strategies developed by teachers who work with migrant students into teacher education programs to prepare future teachers to handle mobile student populations. The school district and school should use the recommendations made by Lash and Kirkpatrick regarding the sharing of strategies found successful in working with highly mobile students in high-need schools.

Pressure Cooker: Teacher Stress and Burnout

Internal Expectations and Demands

Participants described changes in school structures, reform initiatives, and excessive expectations from the school district as creating difficult work conditions. They expressed frustration with school district changes to school structures resulting in staff conflict, overcrowding, and interference in building a sense of community. The top-down approach to school reform ignored teachers' expertise, imposed an impractical instructional system, and created additional work and stress on participants. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with reforms imposed on schools by educators who lacked an understanding of teaching in high-need schools.

My data revealed tensions occurring from the emphasis on teacher accountability determined through student test performance. Pressure to raise student achievement high jacked school and district priorities, narrowed instruction to focus on reading and math, increased academic pressure at early ages, and restricted teacher autonomy. Participants expressed frustration from pressure exerted to raise test scores because the practice discounted the impact of student needs on school performance and ignored the professional judgment of teachers in high-need schools.

My study indicated a need for teachers to have a voice in decisions that directly impact their daily work. At the school district level, I recommend exploring the needs and priorities teachers identify for their school. This would allow teachers the opportunity to help determine initiatives, programming, and services they will implement in their school. I recommend reforms initiated from outside the school include a liaison assigned to the school to direct implementation, evaluate progress, and provide ongoing feedback. At the school level, gaining

consensus and buy-in from staff will help ensure support and commitment for successful implementation of initiatives. I recommend teachers seek opportunities to serve on district committees to assure representation of high poverty schools.

External Expectations and Demands

Participants described feeling judged and blamed by the harsh, critical views of the media and general public who lacked understanding of the complexity of their work in high poverty schools. They experienced distress resulting from the low opinion people outside education held for the work they did in high poverty schools.

The study revealed the need for developing a greater understanding of the complexity of teaching in high-need schools. I recommend teachers take opportunities to educate people they come in contact with about their work in high-need schools. Teachers sharing student growth and progress not measured in test scores made in their schools may expand the general public's view of student achievement. Teachers sharing knowledge about the benefits and limitations of standardized tests may inform people outside education about different ways to measure student success (Popham, 1999). This effort may reframe the conversations about student achievement in high-need schools. Teachers need to advance an understanding of the complexity of their work and progress made in high-need schools through conversations with parents and people outside education.

Participants experienced uncertainty, frustration, and loss in their work. Recognizing this lack of control, participants focused on ways they could respond or cope with these situations. They devised strategies to guard against the negative aspects decreasing commitment to their work in high-need schools.

Coping Strategies

Participants described distancing themselves at certain times from their feelings about a student's difficult home life to avoid thinking about how student's circumstances may affect them. Instead, teachers maintained high expectations and focused on making educational gains for every student. Study participants identified support outside school through family, friends, and groups as important to coping with demands of their work. They expressed the importance of having a life outside of school. Establishing limits and boundaries to maintain a balance in life helped curtail the effects of stress.

Summary

Teachers, like other people, want to feel successful at work and act to make gains and avoid failure (Bandura, 1997). Organizational conditions may promote or undermine the beliefs people hold about their efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Work factors leading to greater confidence and professionalism increased commitment while factors heightening uncertainty and limiting power decreased commitment. Work factors influencing commitment require attention at all levels of the organization. Table 2 summarizes recommendations I support based on the findings in my study. In some cases, I recommend and cite strategies from scholars with expertise in working with parent involvement and highly mobile students living in poverty.

Factor Influencing Commitment	Recommendations Based on Findings
Teacher-Student Relationships	Structure class activities to get to know students in the fall. Meet with students outside instructional periods to get to know them. Establish a school-wide mentoring program.
Parent-Teacher Relationships	Reduce barriers for parents by providing childcare during school events, transportation, and flexibility in scheduling of events, (Haeseler, 2011). Meet in locations convenient for parents (Matuszny et al., 2007). Build relationships through an informal school sponsored event (Matuszny et al., 2007). Share positive communications with parents about their child (Matuszny et al., 2007). Personally invite parents to school events and provide meals at school events. Provide parenting classes that support working with their child on academics at home.
Collegial Relationships	Establish common planning times for teams. Provide opportunities for teachers to get to know each other before school starts. Plan orientation to support new staff, pair new staff with seasoned teachers for support, and structure opportunities for teachers to work together to improve use of the curriculum.
Professionalism	Support autonomy in professional development, allow teachers to determine the focus of their continued development, create opportunities for professional conversations among teachers, and form study groups (Nieto, 2001).
Values and a History of Service in High-need schools	Require sociology classes focused on poverty in teacher preparation programs (Robinson, 2007). Provide credible mentors, establish teams of teachers, and offer professional development by teachers experienced working with students living in poverty (Haberman and Post, 1998).
Student Behavior	Train new teachers in effective behavior management strategies. Develop classroom behavior management plans with team-mates. Ensure mental health services provided in schools adequately address the number of students needing service. Engage mental health professionals in ongoing conversations with teachers about mental health issues impacting classrooms.
Staff Mobility	Bring together the school district, teachers' union, and teachers to examine ways to stabilize high poverty schools. Restrict involuntary mobility of teachers and principals. Establish a memorandum of agreement to limit layoffs of teachers in high poverty schools. Identify the support needed by individual principals to stabilize staffing.
Student Mobility	Implement strategies developed by teachers working with migrant students including frequent review of behavior and learning expectations, using knowledge of various curricula to fill in instructional gaps, and adjusting instructional strategies (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Facilitate teachers sharing strategies they use to work with highly mobile students in high-need schools (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990). Incorporate strategies developed by teachers who work with migrant students into teacher education programs (Lash & Kirkpatrick, 1990)
Internal Expectations and Demands	Examine the needs and priorities teachers identify for their school. Reforms initiated from outside the school include a liaison to direct implementation, evaluate progress, and provide ongoing feedback. Teachers in high-need school need to serve on district committees.
External Expectations and Demands	Educate people about the work of teachers in high-need schools.

Table 2. Recommendations Based on Findings

The voices of teachers in this study provided insight into why they stayed; additional research could extend and heighten an understanding of teacher commitment. Findings from my

study reveal a need to learn more about sustaining teacher commitment to working in high-need schools. The importance of providing economically disadvantaged students with dedicated teachers and a stable educational environment requires further study.

Recommendations for Additional Research

I conducted a qualitative study of veteran teachers in high-need elementary schools to explore how these teachers experienced and interpreted their work resulting in continued commitment. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge to assist leaders in understanding factors motivating teachers to continue to work in these schools. I hoped to understand teachers' experiences and identify factors schools could alter to increase teacher commitment to high-need schools. Veteran teachers selected as participants had a wealth of experiences to share and chose to remain in their high-need school. However, my findings indicated a need to learn more about why teachers stay in high-need schools. Based on Super (1953) and Huberman's (1993) theories of career stages, I recommend additional research with teachers earlier in their career to broaden the scope of understanding about teacher commitment in high-need schools. Since participants in this study represented only Pre-K-5 and Pre-K-8 schools, additional research needs to occur within high school subject areas experiencing difficulty retaining qualified teachers. Participants mentioned turnover of administrators as a concern, indicating an important area to study in high-need schools. A study of administrators in high-need schools could lead to stable leadership, sustained vision, and continuous improvement of a school's academic program.

Limitations

Purposeful, criterion sampling of participants used in my study to gain in-depth knowledge from those who experienced a phenomenon might pose challenges for generalizing to teachers in other high-need schools (Merriam, 2002). Although the sample size proved adequate

for data saturation and analysis of my phenomenological study, this does not mean findings apply to all teachers in high-need schools. However, the descriptive data and findings hold potential for individuals who determine their context as similar to those within my study (Merriam, 2002). Another possible limitation to generalization included the selection of participants from one urban school district. Experiences of participants reflected the context in which they occurred, requiring readers to determine the applicability of findings to another setting (Merriam, 2002).

Conclusion

Exploring experiences of veteran teachers revealed organizational aspects increasing and decreasing commitment to continue work in high poverty schools. Relationships, professionalism, and values and a history of service in high-need schools led to enhanced self-efficacy and increased commitment to the work. When teachers felt a lack of control over factors decreasing commitment, they sought opportunities to regain control, focused their energy on what they could control, and developed coping strategies.

The findings point to the central role relationships play in the work teachers in high poverty schools do. Relationships with student, families, and colleagues increase student learning, teacher enjoyment, professional growth, and a connection to the school resulting in increased commitment to continuing to work in their school. Figure 2 shows the positive outcomes connected with relationships for teachers in high-need schools.

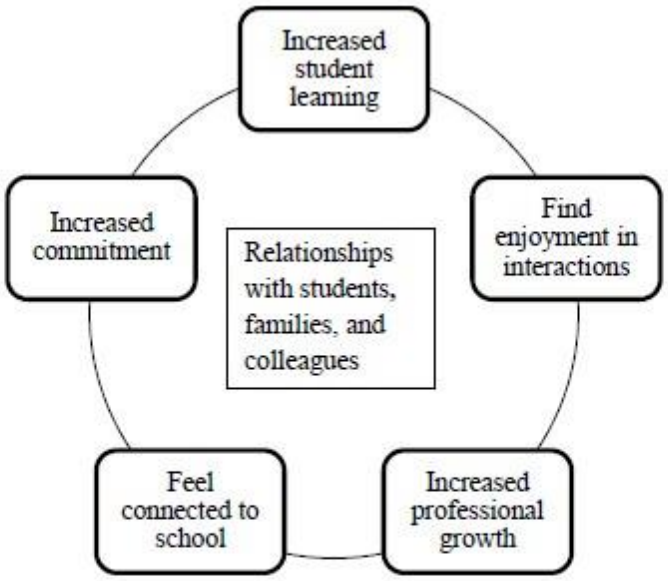

Figure 2 Outcomes of relationships with students, families, and colleagues for teachers

Conversely, student behavior, mobility of staff and students, and unreasonable stakeholder expectations and demands work against forming positive relationship and outcomes teachers find satisfying in their work. Student behavior and mobility impede student learning and negatively affect relationships with students and families. Staff mobility interferes with teaming and learning from colleagues, negatively influencing student learning and teacher professional growth. Stakeholder expectations and demands provide a narrow perspective on student progress leading to restricting teacher autonomy, hampering professional growth, student learning, and enjoyment for teachers.

I expected teachers to mention low salaries as a factor leading to dissatisfaction because low salaries surfaced as a factor contributing to job dissatisfaction and teacher attrition in a number of previous scholarly studies (Ingersoll, 2001a/b, 2003; Certo, & Fox, 2002). Teachers most often cite low wages as contributing to the difficulty attracting and retaining teachers (Duke, 1984). Even if teachers entering the profession valued intrinsic rewards more than high

salaries, low salaries could still surface as sources of stress and frustration. However, participants did not specify money as a source of stress or frustration in their work. This aligns with my findings of the importance of intrinsic rewards such as relationships.

The findings regarding student behaviors stemming from mental health issues require immediate attention. Severe student behavior in classrooms creates unsafe conditions for students and interferes with learning. Teachers expressed a lack of confidence and need to learn more about mental health issues affecting their classrooms. Providing safe classrooms conducive to learning for all students requires a two-pronged approach from mental health professionals providing direct support to students and ongoing professional development for teachers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Institutional Review Board
UNIVERSITY of ST. THOMAS

Institutional Review Board - University of St. Thomas
2115 Summit Ave. - Mail #AQU319
St. Paul, MN 55105-1078
Phone: 651-962-5341 - Email: irb@stthomas.edu

DATE: July 1, 2014

TO: Cheryl Ryan
FROM: University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board

PROJECT TITLE: [605725-1] Teacher Retention in High-Need Elementary Schools
REFERENCE #:
SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: July 1, 2014
EXPIRATION DATE: July 1, 2015
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # *[enter category, or delete line]*

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on applicable federal regulations.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of July 1, 2015.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Eleni Roulis at 651-962-5341 or e9roulis@stthomas.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

Appendix B

August 19, 2014

Cheryl Ryan

Dear Cheryl:

On behalf of the we have reviewed your research proposal, "Retaining Teachers in High-Need Elementary Schools". #0-2014-1. It is our pleasure to inform you that your research project has been approved. We believe that your research will benefit the staff and students. Keep in mind that upon completion of your study, a paper copy and an electronic version of the final report must be sent to the Department. Please also send a copy of your report(s) to your District co-sponsor and principal(s) you worked with - electronically, if possible. If your project lasts for more than one year, at the end of each project year, a progress summary report will be due (please submit a paper and electronic version).

You can use this letter as verification that your request to begin conducting research has been granted. Institutional Review Board approval letters must be kept current and remain in files for the duration of the project. If your study should require any modifications, our office should be made aware of it by submitting an addendum to your proposal. If applicable, researchers conducting research studies in our schools must also be registered with Volunteer before any study activities begin. This registration system is in place to ensure that all non-district partners that work within our schools have permission, background checks, and so forth. To complete the registration process, please go to the at Please forward a copy of your completed registration to the Failure to comply with the above stipulations places your project at risk for continuing to conduct research within the or approval of future projects. We wish you the best in your endeavors and look forward to reviewing your progress and/or final report(s) in the near future. Thank you for your interest in the

Sincerely,

Appendix C

Thank you for your time. I am currently working on my dissertation at the University of St. Thomas focusing on teacher retention in high poverty, high-need schools. At this time, research on teacher retention in elementary high-poverty schools is lacking. For this reason, I want to explore the experiences of teachers who choose to work in high-need schools and what contributes to commitment of teachers who choose to remain. For my study, I want to interview K-5 licensed teachers (e.g. classroom teachers, specialists, content specialist, ELL Teachers, Special Education teachers, and teacher leaders) with 10 years of more experience who have elected to work in this school for more than three years. If you would consider being interviewed or want more information please contact me. My cell phone is --- --- ----. My email is: **cheryl.ryan@_____ or Ryan____@_____.**

Appendix D

CONSENT FORM
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

Teacher Retention in High-Need Elementary Schools

605725-1

I am conducting a study about teacher retention in high-need schools. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a veteran teacher working in a school serving many students of color and students living in poverty. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.
Cheryl Ryan (University of St. Thomas doctoral student) is conducting this study.

Background Information:

Previous research has identified teacher turnover as significant and a possible impediment to student achievement. Studies have focused on reasons teachers leave, with an emphasis on career decision-making by teachers, and the impact of efficacy. Research also focused on identifying characteristics of effective urban teachers, and studies of specialized urban teacher programs using survey research and quantitative methods. At this time, research on teacher retention remains inconclusive and requires additional study. Gaps identified in the research include identifying what motivates elementary teachers from high-need schools to remain, exploring how teachers' personal and relational considerations influence their career choices. This study aims to explore the experiences of teachers who choose to work in high-need schools and what contributes to commitment of teachers who choose to remain.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to engage in a face-to-face interview for about 60 to 90 minutes. If possible, the interview will take place in your classroom. Following the interview, I may contact you again if I need to follow up with clarifying questions. I will request to record and transcribe the interview to ensure an accurate account. Since a recording will accurately capture the conversation, I will not ask you to review the transcription after the interview.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Minimal risks for participants exist. I will make every attempt to safeguard confidentiality using pseudonyms. Participation in the study is voluntary.

The direct benefits you will receive for participating include sharing experiences and knowledge gained through your work in high-need schools that may help others. This body of knowledge has potential for addressing a longstanding issue in education that has negatively impacted students of color and students living in poverty.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for the participants.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include recordings of our interview, transcripts of the interview, and computer records of analyzed and coded data from the interview. I will store all digital records on my personal, password protected computer. My dissertation chair, Dr. Sarah Noonan and I will have sole access to the data. I will destroy the audio recordings following transcription. Following completion of my study, I will provide a summary of my dissertation findings to district staff upon request.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until February 1, 2015. Should you decide to withdraw, I will remove data collected about you from the study. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Cheryl Ryan. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at ___-___-_____. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Sarah Noonan, at ___-___-_____. The University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board can be reached at ___-___-____ with any questions or concerns you may have.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age. I give consent to have the interview audiotaped.

_____ _____

Signature of Study Participant **Date**

_____

Print Name of Study Participant

_____ _____

Signature of Researcher **Date**

_____ _____

Signature of Chair **Date**

Appendix E

Existing Scholarly Literature	Research Questions
Career Decisions -early experiences and initial commitment -Career stages Organizational Factors -Relationships Leaders Peers Students -Structural frame Support Psychological/Professional Factors - Teacher efficacy - Resiliency - Psychic rewards	How do veteran teachers working in high-need, urban schools with primarily economically disadvantaged students experience and make meaning of their work? - What experiences, beliefs, and values guide/influence their work teaching high-need students? - How does teaching in a high-need school affect their view of students, teaching, and the nature of education? - What internal and external factors/conditions affect their commitment and success in serving high-need students? - How does teaching economically disadvantage students in high-need schools influence their personal and professional growth? - How do veteran teachers sustain their commitment to serve economically disadvantaged student in a high-need school?

Appendix F

Interview Protocol

Name: _____ Years of Teaching: _____ Years in present school:_____

Biographical Questions

- Tell me about your teaching history.
- How did you become interested in teaching?
- What led you to teach in this school?
- What influences/guides your work in this school?
- How would you describe commitment?

Career Questions

- How have you changed as a teacher since you began teaching?
- How is teaching in this school different than you expected?
- How has your perspective of working with students changed?
- How would you describe your work in this school to a person who is not a teacher?
- Tell me how you continue to grow professionally and personally.
- What do you see yourself doing in five years? Why?

Organizational Questions

- If there was ever a time when you considered leaving teaching or this school, what changed your mind?
- Some people say that keeping teachers in high-need schools is a struggle. Describe what motivates teachers to stay in these schools. What motivates you to stay?
- Describe what it looks like, feels, like, sounds like to work in this school.
- How is the work here different from work teachers do in other schools?

Commitment Questions

- What does teaching in this school mean to you?
- What motivated you to teach in this school?
- Describe a situation that you found rewarding.
- Tell me about a time when you found teaching difficult and how you made it through.
- What in your personal history, do you draw on as you work in this school?
- Tell me about when and how you realized you were committed to this school.
- What advice would you give a teacher starting to work in a high need school?